

# The Golden Venture

J. S. Fletcher.

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# THE GOLDEN VENTURE

BY


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LONDON  
EVELEIGH NASH

1912



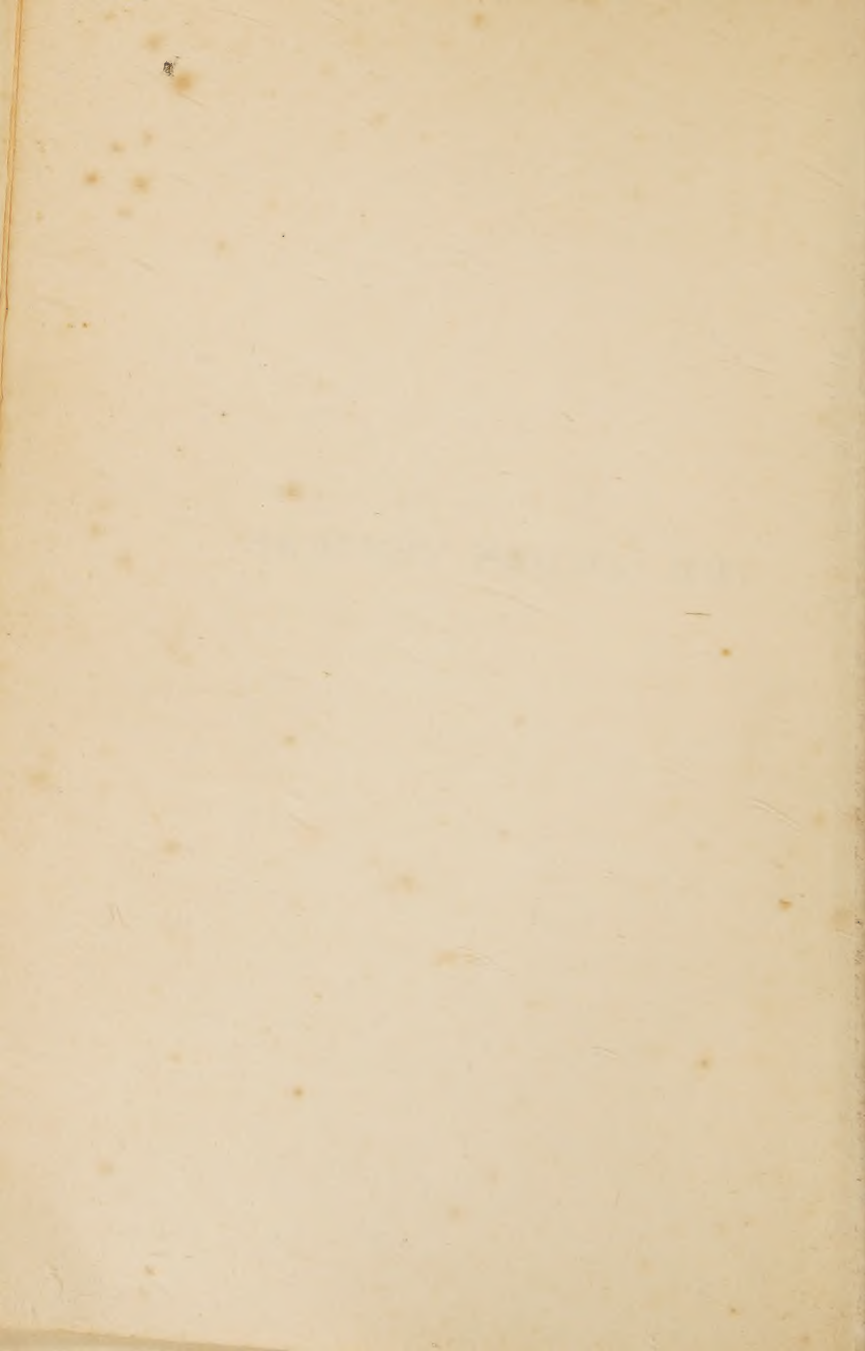


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THE GOLDEN VENTURE



# The Golden Venture

## CHAPTER I

There were comparatively few passengers on board the steam-packet from Ostend to Dover that afternoon, and at five o'clock, when most of them had gone down to the saloon for tea or coffee, according to the tastes of their different nationalities, the upper deck was almost deserted. Two ecclesiastics, each carrying an enormous umbrella, marched up and down in earnest conversation; another, seated in a quiet corner near the bridge, read steadily at a small black-bound book from which his eyes were rarely lifted. A young man and a younger woman, obviously just married and on their honeymoon, whispered together in the loneliest nook they had been able to find. A fat, comfortable-looking Belgian, his hands folded across his ample waistcoat, snored audibly from the depths of a deck-chair which occasionally creaked beneath his weight; near him a spectacled lady,



an undoubted German, was making anxious consultation with a red-covered Baedeker and a railway guide. None of these people concerned themselves with anything beyond their very immediate surroundings. Seaward there was nothing to look at. The *Princess Elizabeth* had run out of Ostend in one of those curious white fogs which come over the English Channel in very hot weather, and in the white fog she still remained.

There was one passenger on board who looked round about him at the impenetrable curtains of filmy vapour with feelings of particular resentment and impatience. This was a young man who from leaving Ostend had paced the deck with ceaseless, rapid strides, and at last, as time had gone on, had taken up a position forward, gazing steadily in front of him, as if he wished his keen eyes to pierce the mists and show him what lay before. Some of his fellow-passengers had noticed his eager looks and had formed their own theories about them. The honeymooning couple had allowed themselves to decide that he was a young husband anxious to return to his wife; a phlegmatic Dutchwoman had decided that he was one of those for whom nothing can ever go fast enough.

She was nearer the truth than the sentimental ones—the young man was impatient to be getting on. Not that there was anything to fear as regards the arrival of the steamer at its appointed time ; he had already reassured himself that the fog would make little or no difference in that respect. What he was impatient about was catching sight of the white cliffs of Dover. He had been looking forward to that supreme moment during a long railway journey—it was a disappointment to find the Channel obscured by fog.

Other eyes—female eyes—had looked this young man over with feelings other than those of mere speculation as to his palpable impatience. He was a goodly individual to look upon—a tall, well-set-up, athletic youngster of apparently twenty-one or twenty-two years ; handsome of face, alert of manner, quick of eye. His complexion, naturally dark, was much tanned, as if by exposure to sun and wind ; the small, almost black moustache, brushed well upwards towards the angle of his eyes, gave him a half-military appearance ; the eyes themselves, dark blue with a glint of steel in them, had at times a look of something approaching to fierceness, which in reality denoted a considerable

reserve of energy. It was somewhat difficult to classify this young man, thought those who watched him as he paced the deck. His well-cut, neatly fitting suit of dark serge, finished off with smart boots and a Homburg hat, gave no clue to his profession or calling. Some young officer making a holiday to England, said his fellow-passengers; and those of the gentler sex sharing this opinion viewed him with interest, wondering if he had some love affair in the famous island which the white fog still hid from view.

If there had been anyone on board the *Princess Elizabeth* of more than ordinary observation there might have been noticed about the young man in the Homburg hat a certain peculiarity which would have excited the curiosity of any person of imagination. When he came on board at Ostend he held in his left hand a small leather bag or case, about two and a half feet in length, a foot and a half in width, and nine inches in depth. This case he carried—still in his left hand—during his parade up and down the deck; this case—still in close proximity to his left hand—now rested on a seat before him as he leant against the rail gazing westward. And if sharp eyes had looked



closer they would have seen that the case was secured to its owner's wrist and forearm by a thin chain of steel, which was securely fastened to the handle of a curiously contrived hood of steel-bound leather which protected the lock. But when the owner walked up and down the chain was not seen; it passed from his wrist inside the palm of his hand. Lounging carelessly against the rail he permitted it to be seen; there was, however, at that moment no one near enough to see it.

In spite of the white, clinging fog the afternoon was warm almost to unpleasantness. Naturally, there was no wind, and the sea over which the *Princess Elizabeth* forged her steady way was as smooth as a mountain tarn. "If only the fog would lift!" thought the impatient traveller. He turned away from the rail, and the steel chain tightened about his arm and again became invisible in the palm of his hand. The next moment he became aware of the disadvantage of having even one hand encumbered so as to be useless. A lady, stepping on deck from the stairs of the saloon, dropped a quantity of magazines and newspapers almost at the young man's feet. It fell to his lot to essay their rescue with the hand that remained available

to him. He felt awkward and confused, and he had a suspicion that the owner of the scattered literature was smiling at his clumsiness, and wondering why he did not use both hands.

He looked up at last to find a pair of very fine dark eyes regarding him with amusement. He handed back the magazines and newspapers, and lifted his hat with ceremonious politeness. "I am sorry," he said, with an ingenuous candour that was distinctly boyish, "I can only employ one hand; the other is—engaged."

The possessor of the dark eyes smiled. She nodded comprehendingly. "So I see," she said. "You must be guarding something very precious that you take the precaution to attach it to your person by a chain."

The young man also smiled, and glanced at his leather case. "I am a little absent-minded," he said. "Sometimes I leave things lying about. I have lost things—things of value—in railway carriages, and so——"

"And so, having something of very particular value," she said, laughing, "you determined to secure it in such a fashion that you could not possibly lose it before arriving in England. Never mind, we shall soon be in Dover."

She had already tossed the magazines and newspapers into one deck-chair, and she now sat down in another at its side. Something in her manner seemed to inform the young man of the strangely secured leather case that she was by no means averse to one of those easy-going, informal chats which spring into sudden existence amongst travellers; he also sat down, resting the case upon his knee.

"Dover?" he said. "Yes, I am anxious to see Dover. This fog is tiresome; surely we should see the English cliffs by this time if the fog were not here?"

As he spoke he was examining his fellow-passenger's face, not remembering that he had seen her on the boat before. He decided that she was about his own age, and that she was either very handsome or very beautiful—he could not at that moment tell which. If it were beauty it was of a proud and somewhat haughty type, he thought, and he reflected that a certain artist friend of his own would have liked to make a sketch of her profile. Great manes of hair, dark as his own, were drawn away under her large hat from above level brows; her eyes were hawk-like in quickness and expression; her nose aquiline; her lips



proud ; her chin full of resource and determination. She was of more than the ordinary height of woman ; nearly as tall as himself, indeed, and her supple figure gave him the impression of a strength of body as great in its way as the evident mental strength in her features and eyes. From her attire he judged her to be of the classes of wealth and leisure—one of those young Englishwomen who are so different in some strange, unaccountable way from their Continental sisters of the same age and station. He looked at her with all the innocence of a candid schoolboy ; she, on her part, regarded him with something of an amused interest.

“ I shouldn’t wonder if the fog lifts before we reach Dover,” she said. “ I have often seen these white mists disappear quite suddenly towards the end of the afternoon. But why are you so anxious to see Dover and the cliffs of England ? ”

“ Because I never have seen them,” he replied.

She looked at him with evident surprise. “ Never seen them ! ” she exclaimed. “ But—you are English ? ”

He laughed as if at a joke. “ English ! Yes,

indeed I am English," he answered. "However, I have never seen this part of England that we are coming to. I was taken away from England—the north of England—when I was quite a child—five years old I think I was then—and I have never been back since."

She looked at him with renewed interest, as if trying to settle within her own mind some question which his admission had raised.

"Then you are quite a stranger to England?" she said.

He nodded, and once more looked ahead as if anxious to make acquaintance with something long desired. "Yes," he replied, with simple directness. "I have no other recollection of England than one of a great manufacturing town in the north—the town where I was born. I remember the grey skies, the smoke from the tall chimneys, and the clatter and clang of the workshops."

"You are going back there?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, I shall go back—just to see it," he answered. "That is a matter of course. But I want to see London—London."

Something like an expression of distaste came over the girl's face. The hawk-like eyes

flashed for a moment and then grew hard ; the beautifully curved lips tightened into a straight line.

“A good many people,” she said, as the lips relaxed again into a smile that was half bitter, half contemptuous—“a good many people would not care much if they never set eyes on London again.”

But the young man who had never seen London was too much absorbed in his own dreams to notice this sudden change of manner in his companion. His eyes were fixed on unseen things—far away.

“London, of course,” he murmured, as if talking to himself—“London is the only possible place.”

“The only possible place for what?” she asked.

The dreamer started, and something like a blush overspread his tanned face. “I beg your pardon,” he said. “I told you I was absent-minded. Well, the only possible place to make one’s fortune.”

“Oh!” she replied half-mockingly. She stretched a slim forefinger towards the jealously guarded case. “And is the secret of yours in—there?” she asked, bringing the full battery of her eyes to bear upon him.



The seeker after fortune stared at her in unfeigned surprise. His left hand unconsciously closed over the steel chain.

"What made you think that?" he said.

She laughed. "Ah, I am very clever!" she answered. "And—but look!"

Following the direction of her outstretched hand the young man turned. And as he turned the *Princess Elizabeth* shot out of the enveloping fog into clear, bright sunlight and a shining sea, and there, high above him, Laurence Workman saw the white cliffs of England for the first time. He uttered an exclamation of rapturous delight and sprang to the rail, gazing as if he could never take his fill of the pleasure this long-anticipated moment gave him. When at last he turned to his companion of the moment she had gone.

He saw her again for a brief instant amidst the bustle and hurry of the landing-stage at Dover; she gave him a quick nod and a smile as she stepped into the London train. And the thought shaped itself within him:

"I wonder if I shall ever see her again?"

## CHAPTER II

Much as he desired to see London and to set about the making of the great fortune which he felt confident awaited him there, Laurence was in no particular haste to reach the metropolis. His visit to England had been long anticipated and carefully mapped out. He meant to spend his first night in Dover ; his second day and night at Canterbury ; a day and night—perhaps longer—at Rochester ; he wished, in short, to approach London by degrees. And so, when he had seen the London train depart and had lingered a little on the pier, staring and marvelling at the castle-crowned heights above the picturesque harbour, he made his way into the town, looking for an hotel that seemed likely to suit his modest requirements, and revelling in the glories of an English summer evening. To him it was all new and strange and delightful ; it roused curious feelings and emotions to think that after all he was in his own native land, and breathing his native air.

Laurence soon found a convenient abiding-place, in close proximity to the harbour, and was speedily engaged in making his toilette in a room which overlooked the sea. The jealously guarded case, now released from the chain which had secured it to his arm, lay open on the bed. Thus placed, there was nothing in its appearance or in such of its contents as could be seen which would have attracted any particular attention. A change of linen, a sleeping-suit, socks, collars, handkerchiefs, articles of toilette, a book or two—there was nothing in these things which seemed to warrant such extraordinary vigilance. But if anyone could have looked through the carefully folded shirts, or had been in a position to turn them over, he would have found a packet, some sixteen inches square, done up in thin boards wrapped about with cartridge paper, and tied with silk tape, heavily sealed with wax on both sides. What that packet contained not a living soul in the world but Laurence Workman knew.

Of its vast importance to him some idea might have been gathered by an observer of its owner's proceedings, had such an one been present in Laurence's room after he had removed the traces of his journey. Selecting

from the case the garments and articles which he required for the night, he closed and locked it, and, winding the steel chain about it, secured that by means of a curious-looking padlock which he produced from his waistcoat pocket. Then he carried the case downstairs to the hotel office, and asking for the manager, saw it duly locked up in the safe. That done he breathed a sigh of relief, as a man does who comes off work or duty for the day, and went with great content to eat the dinner which he had already ordered.

The coffee-room of the hotel was small and quiet, and when Laurence entered had but one occupant, in whom he immediately recognised a fellow-passenger on board the *Princess Elizabeth*. This, a foreign ecclesiastic, presumably a Belgian, was middle-aged and grave of countenance, who wore his cassock, bands, and sash; his wide-brimmed hat and large umbrella lay on a chair near the table at which he was dining. He replied to Laurence's respectful salutation with a dignified bow, but made no attempt to engage the young man in conversation. Laurence lost little time over his dinner—the June evening and the charm of his new surroundings called him, and ere long he found him-



self treading the Dover streets, making his way toward the Castle Hill. It still wanted half an hour of sunset when he stood on a high plateau and looked across the Straits towards Calais. The white fog had gone in entirely; a south-west breeze had risen, and the evening was delightfully clear and bright. The long grey line of the French coast was clearly visible; he could see the towers and spires of the town which once was England's. He knew it was twenty miles across the Straits, but in the illusive light of the summer evening the distance seemed far less. And, as if in answer to his own thoughts, a cracked, piping voice sounded in his ears from close by where he stood.

"Don't look so very far across there, master, does it?" said the voice.

Laurence turned and saw a very old man, evidently an ancient mariner, who sat in a cleft of the rock, smoking his pipe. He was gnarled and weather-beaten, and from his appearance seemed old enough to have been with Nelson at Trafalgar.

"No," Laurence replied. "No, it does not look to be very far."

"Matter o' twenty mile," said the ancient, blowing forth a cloud of blue smoke. "Does it

in an hour, does these here turbines. I've heard my father talk o' the times when there wasn't even steamers 'twixt here and Calley. Fast sailing boats they had—what they called packet-boats. Took 'em hours and hours, it did, sometimes, 'cording to what wind there was. Do it in an hour now, does these here turbines, I say. But, Lor' bless yer, what's turbines and steam nowadays, since these here flying-machines come in? I see the first man as ever flew across—last year that were. He done it in less nor forty minutes. Never thought I should live to see such a thing, master!"

"You saw M. Blériot arrive?" exclaimed Laurence, in high delight at finding an eyewitness of what was to him one of the most historic occasions in the world's history.

"Well, I can't 'zactly say as I see him actually arrive, master," answered the old man. "'Cause I didn't. But I see him arriving. He were out there when I see him come flying in, and I were in the town below. Of course, he disappeared behind the castle here. All the same, I seen him flying. It's a marvellous age, is this here, master."

"It will be more marvellous yet," thought Laurence, and gave the ancient money where-

with to buy tobacco. He went slowly back to the town, stopping here and there, going aside here and there, to look at old churches or houses, and it was not until dusk had fallen over town and harbour and their surrounding heights that he re-entered his hotel. There seemed to be no one staying in it, with the exception of the grave-faced ecclesiastic and himself; he found the former in the smoking-room, placidly enjoying a cigar and reading a newspaper. He still seemed indisposed for conversation, and Laurence, who had had a long railway journey before joining the boat at Ostend, soon left him and retired to his own room. Glancing at the visitors' book as he passed through the hall he saw inscribed beneath his own signature another—M. L'Abbé Bremond, Bruges. Laurence came to the conclusion that the Abbé was commencing a vacation in England. He was strengthened in this idea next morning when he heard him (in excellent English) inquiring of the waiter as to the best forenoon train for Canterbury. Thereupon he ventured to break the ice.

“I too purpose staying in Canterbury, sir,” he said, when the waiter had left the room for a time-table. “There are, I understand, many

magnificent historical monuments to be seen there ? ”

M. Bremond bowed, and looked somewhat surprised. “But you are surely English ? ” he said.

“Yes, but out of England since childhood,” replied Laurence.

“Ah ! just so,” responded the Abbé. “Then if you have never seen Canterbury you have a great pleasure before you. I know it well—I have spent many good days there.”

He went on to talk so learnedly and well about the old cathedral city and its beauties that Laurence began to hope that they might travel there together so that he should have the benefit of M. Bremond’s undoubted knowledge. But when the waiter returned with the timetable he also brought a telegram for the Abbé, which the latter at once opened. It appeared to Laurence that he seemed somewhat disappointed on reading it.

“This will keep me here until evening,” he said. “Otherwise I should have been glad to offer myself as your guide. Let me advise you to spend all the time you can in Canterbury—there is, I see, an excellent train at eleven o’clock. Travelling by that you will be able

to spend the whole of your afternoon in looking round the city. If I should be able to come on there this evening you will find me at the Rose Hotel at nine o'clock. I may have a friend with me whom I expect by the evening boat."

Laurence thanked M. Bremond, and determined to take his advice. There then only remained to discharge his bill and to claim his precious case. He was a little concerned as to what to do with the latter during the day's proceedings, for he had no intention of allowing it to go out of his hands until he was fairly settled for the night. Remembering how in his student days he had often carried a knapsack much heavier than the case was, he called in at a sadler's shop on his way to the station, and purchasing some stout straps contrived whilst in the train so to adjust them to the case that he could fit the latter on his shoulders without any discomfort to himself.

Thus equipped, and with a heart full of pleasurable anticipation, Laurence walked out of the station at Canterbury thoroughly prepared to enjoy his day. It was then high noon, and the old cathedral city was full of life and colour. To him, who had never until then seen an English town of like nature,



Canterbury was a revelation and a dream. Determining, after a first cursory glance at it, that it would well warrant him in staying at least a day longer than he had originally intended, he decided to defer systematic inspection of its beauties until the morrow, when the Abbé would have arrived. In the mean time he proposed to stray hither and thither, wherever his fancy led him.

Wandering here and there, then, about the sunlit streets or in the shady nooks and corners around the grey cathedral, Laurence passed some hours of supreme happiness. But, fond as any mortal may be of strolling around newly-seen cities and towns, the irrepressible mortal in us inevitably calls for rest and refreshment, and he suddenly discovered that he was both tired and hungry. He looked about him for a suitable place wherein to sit down, and at the same time to restore the energies which he had expended. He had wandered out of the heart of the city and found himself in a quaint, old-fashioned neighbourhood which, had he not been weary and famished, would have interested him still more than it did. He began to search for a real old-world English inn—one of those delightful survivals of the ancient days of which

he had heard and read so much. And as fortune, or luck, or destiny would have it, he found what he wanted at the first corner.

It was such a beau ideal of a wayside inn, such a replica of the pictures which he had seen of English inns, that he almost cried out with delight when he turned a corner and set eyes on it. It filled three sides of a quadrangle ; its walls were low, its roof high ; the walls were half-timbered, the roof was thatched. The yard in front of it was paved with cobble-stones ; there was a paving of bright red tiles all round it, and over the paving a pent-house of wood, from which, here and there, hung baskets of climbing plants in flower. There were more flowers in the windows, in bright red pots, and through an open door he caught the gleam of brass and pewter and old oak, all shining with much polish. And over the door, on a curiously-carved pediment, were three equally curious figures of wood, much weather-worn and misshapen, but without doubt having some reference to the pilgrims who used to visit Canterbury in mediæval times. Beneath them was the legend in modern but quaint lettering : " The Three Travellers, by Antony Waple. Good Entertainment for Man and Beast."

Laurence lost no time in crossing the cobble-paved yard and entering the door of the Three Travellers. Had he known that the step which carried him over the threshold was also the most momentous step he had ever taken in his life, he might have paused ; had he also known to what it would lead him he would certainly have gone on.

He found himself in a quaint, old-fashioned inn parlour, with old furniture, old pictures, old brass, china, and pewter about it ; fragrant with the scent of roses and freshly-gathered flowers. At first he thought it was empty of human life, but as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom he saw that he was not alone. Sitting at a little work-table in the deep window-place, her hands filled with needlework, which she laid down as Laurence entered, was a girl—a slim, lissome, brown-haired, grey-eyed English girl, sweet as the cluster of red and pink roses that filled a great china bowl which stood on the table before her. She stood up and took a step forward.

For what seemed a long moment these two young people looked with a strange questioning into each other's eyes.

### CHAPTER III

Until that moment Laurence had never known what it is to feel that complete confusion which reduces those who experience it to silence. Encouraged at all times by his parents to speak his thoughts freely he was naturally of a frank and open temperament, and ready of conversation with anyone he chanced to meet. But now, confronted by this young English girl, whom he instinctively recognised as being of a type of which he had read much but seen nothing, he felt suddenly reduced to a strange inability to find his tongue, and became conscious in a painful fashion that he was growing very warm and red because of his awkwardness. As for the girl of the brown hair and grey eyes she, too, for some reason unaccountable to herself, also blushed as she returned Laurence's ardent gaze. Woman-like, however, she was more self-possessed than he, and she was the first to speak.

"Is there anything I can do for you, sir?" she said.

Laurence thought her voice as sweet as her face. He tried to find words which seemed suitable, but as he removed his Homburg hat could think of nothing beyond the bare announcement of his immediate necessities.

"Thank you—I am in need of something to eat and drink," he said. "I thought, perhaps——"

Without more ado the girl stepped aside and threw open the door of a low-ceilinged parlour, not quite so inviting to Laurence as that which they stood in, but obviously used as a coffee-room. She motioned him to enter, and pointed to a side-board.

"There is cold beef, sir, and cold ham, and a pigeon-pie," she said, indicating these comestibles. "I am sorry there are no hot potatoes, but I can get you a salad fresh from the garden."

"That is excellent, thank you," answered Laurence. "If you will please to give me some cold beef—I have heard so much of English roast beef—and the fresh salad from the garden. And, if you please, some ale—home-brewed, is it not?"

The girl smiled. "I'm afraid there is no home-brewed ale in England now," she said. "But there is some very good bitter beer here."



"Then I will drink the bitter beer," he replied. "A large measure—a pint, eh?"

She smiled again at his almost boyish manner, and going back to the bar-parlour drew a jugful of foaming ale and brought it to him with a glass. Something prompted her to fill the glass with her own hands.

"I thank you, and I drink to your good fortune," said Laurence, as he took the glass. "This is the first time I have ever drunk English ale in England."

The girl, now busying herself in setting the cold beef on the table, looked at him with surprise in her grey eyes.

"Indeed, sir!" she said.

"Yes," said Laurence, who was now finding his tongue. "I am an Englishman, but I have never been in England since I was five years old, until last night. This is, therefore, a great day," he continued, draining the glass of its contents. "Quite a festival!"

The girl added a finishing touch to the table arrangements. "I must cut the salad myself," she said, thoughtfully. "The servant has gone into the city to do some shopping. You shall not be kept waiting long, sir."

Laurence was about to make some gallant

reply to this, but she had already left the room, and he presently saw her moving about the garden outside. When she finally disappeared at a door in the rear of the house he turned to examine the room into which she had brought him. It was as quaint and old-fashioned as the rest of the place, with oak panelling and oak beams, hunting and coaching pictures on the walls, a grandfather clock in one corner, a cupboard full of china in another. And everywhere there was the scent of June roses, mingling with that of the fresh scents that came through the open window.

"It is good to be in England," he said, with a burst of candour, when the girl came back with a bowl full of an inviting-looking salad. "This is delightful!"

She gave him an understanding look. "I am glad," she said, quietly, and left him to himself.

Then Laurence did what he had not meant to do until night. He unloosed the straps which secured the leather case to his shoulders, and placed his burden on the table before him. After that he set to with a will upon a real English, country-inn luncheon. He had done full justice to it when the girl of the grey eyes

returned to suggest that he might like some raspberry tart.

"Anything—anything that is English!" said Laurence, rapturously. "I like this place; it is much nicer than hotels. I wonder if I might be allowed to stay here for the night—no, for two nights?"

The girl seemed to consider matters. "I should think so," she said. "There is a very good spare room. But my uncle, Mr. Waple, will be here in a few minutes now, and I will send him in to you, sir."

"Is he what they call the host?" asked Laurence.

"Yes, he is the host—the landlord," she answered, smiling. "He—but here he is, sir."

Laurence, looking through the open door into the bar-parlour, saw the outer entrance suddenly filled and the sunlight obscured by the figure of one of the biggest men he had ever seen in his life. The individual, quite six feet in height, was correspondingly bulky. His face was like a full moon in dimensions, but ruddy as an autumn sun; his hands resembled small legs of mutton; his tread shook the floor, as his voice shook the rafters. He came forward, wiping his wide forehead with an

enormous handkerchief, and at sight of the stranger made a jerky sort of bow, to which Laurence responded with courtesy.

"Servant, sir," said Mr. Waple.

"You are very kind," responded Laurence, once more at a loss for fitting words. "I am delighted to find such a fine old inn."

"Uncle," said the girl, "this gentleman has just been asking if he can engage a room for the next two nights."

"I prefer it to an hotel," added Laurence.

"And very wise you are, sir," said Mr. Waple, sitting down heavily on a stout sofa and continuing to mop his brow. "Much more comfortable here than in any hotel in London or Parry or anywhere. Cert'ny, sir, cert'ny. Glad to make you at home. We've a nice spare room, and the bed's well aired, I'll warrant. Charity, my girl, draw your uncle a pint of ale."

Laurence was so interested in hearing the name of his hostess that he forgot to eat his raspberry tart until her return with a large silver cup, out of which Mr. Waple, murmuring something about his best respects and attention, took a long pull with every appearance of great relief and satisfaction. That over, he



recommenced the mopping of his brow, and then favoured Laurence and the crown-leather case with a good-natured inspection.

"Traveller, sir, I reckon?" said Mr. Waple. "Charity, my dear, see that the gentleman's room is made ready—soap, towels, and such-like. My niece, sir, keeping house for me while my old lady is away seasiding. Fine weather for seasiding, sir—and for travelling. Having a look round, sir, no doubt?"

"No," replied Laurence, whom Mr. Waple deeply interested; "at least, yes, I suppose I am. But I have come home"—and he proceeded to give the landlord an account of his long absence from his native land. "It's beautiful to be back," he concluded, with the boyish smile which won everybody with whom Laurence came in contact. "It's beautiful!"

"Beautiful! I should think it was beautiful, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Waple. "Heaven bless my soul! To think of an Englishman being kept out of his lawful heritage for all them years! But then, of course, if your father's business took him to foreign parts—why, equally, of course, it did. You ought to be thankful, sir, that you've kept up your mother tongue. But, Lor' bless us, seventeen of the best years of

your youthful life out of your native sphere! What a deal there is that you've got to see."

"Yes," said Laurence, "there is indeed. I've only just had a mere look at the cathedral."

Mr. Waple took another pull at his silver cup. "I won that pigeon-shooting," he said, nodding at the cup as he set it down. "Cathedrals, eh? Ah! I weren't exactly thinking about cathedrals, though, of course, cathedrals are all right in their way. What I was thinking about was—pigs."

"Pigs?" said Laurence, somewhat mystified.

"Yes, sir, pigs," replied Mr. Waple. "Pigs, sir, I am deeply interested in. In addition, sir, to being landlord of the Three Travellers, which my father also was, and his before him, I am a pig-dealer. And when you've finished that there bit of lunch—and I'm sure you'll have enjoyed it after living seventeen years on foreigneering messes, though no doubt your poor mother would remember something of English cooking—I'll show you, sir, some of the finest pigs in Kent."

"You are very kind," said Laurence.

"Nothing of the sort," answered Mr. Waple. "Heaven bless my soul!—one's got to kill the fatted calf sometimes, and the sight of them

pigs'll make you feel quite at home. Charity, my dear," he continued, as his niece re-entered the room, "have this gentleman's bag taken to his chamber."

"Oh!" exclaimed Laurence, as the girl herself was about to take away the precious case. "I—I was going to ask you if you had a safe in which that could be locked up; it has some valuable papers in it."

"No, sir," said Mr. Waple, with decision. "A safe is a thing which has never been in this house, and never will be. If the Bank of England was in that bag, sir, it would be as secure while it was under Tony Waple's roof as what it is now. Leave it with my niece, sir, and come with me to see my pigs."

Laurence was by this time so much under the glamour of an old-fashioned English inn, so much in love with brown-haired Charity, and so dominated by the gigantic landlord, that he was willing to consent to anything. Moreover, he felt sure that anything entrusted to Charity would be in safe keeping. So he followed his host into the afternoon sunlight, and prepared to enjoy something of what seemed to be the rural side of English life.

He soon discovered that Mr. Waple was one

of those gentlemen who love nothing so much as to put their thumbs in the armholes of their waistcoats and show off their possessions to a more or less attentive companion. Mr. Waple's chief interest in life was, of course, the Three Travellers, and, after that, pigs. But he had other interests. As a stream ran alongside his house he cultivated a penchant for ducks, and had quite a flotilla of them. Then he was something more than fond of gardening, and had some twenty yards of glass, under which he forced tomatoes, cucumbers, and marrows. It took him a long time to exhibit the glories of the pigs and the ducks and the gardens, and there were signs of approaching eventide when the tour was over. It had pleased Laurence—Mr. Waple was decidedly a character, he thought.

“And now, sir,” said Mr. Waple when they returned to the house, “me and my niece at eight o'clock sharp will sit down to a little something hot and good, and we shall be proud if you will join us. You'll enjoy yourself. Lor' bless us! To think of being seventeen years out of England, in what you might term the flower of your youth! However, you're safe home again.”

Laurence accepted this cordial invitation with great pleasure. He was learning much already,

and he wanted to see Charity at closer quarters. He found his room ; there on the chest of drawers lay his precious leather case, safe enough. He looked round him ; it was a pretty, old-fashioned room. The scent of the garden came through the open window, and on the dressing-table some hand—Charity's hand—had placed a great bunch of red roses.

Laurence approached the case, wanting some toilette articles. But as he drew his keys from his pocket he suddenly paused, staring.

The bottom of the hitherto jealously guarded case had been cut through with one straight, decisive movement of a keen-edged knife. And the papers were gone !



## CHAPTER IV

For several minutes Laurence stood staring at the mutilated case as if he could scarcely credit the evidence of his own eyes. Then, as if wishing to add to that evidence the testimony of yet another sense, he slowly put out his hand and ran his forefinger along the line of the clean, straight cut which the thief's knife had made. And after that he let one sharp word of mingled anger and despair escape him :

“Again !”

For a little while longer he stood rigid, but his eyes were no longer fixed on the case. He stared about the room, as if trying to see the unknown hand which had robbed him of his precious papers. His brows were knitted together in an effort to think, to comprehend, and now and then he shook his head as though the problem which presented itself to him was impossible of solution. And at last he snapped his fingers with a gesture which denoted his complete hopelessness of solving the problem, and a second exclamation escaped him :

“Who can it be?”

It was no use, however, he presently informed himself with a harsh laugh, to stand there speculating. His much-prized packet was gone, and and there was not the slightest doubt that the thief, whoever he was, had tracked him to the Three Travellers, and seized some opportunity of entering his room while he was engaged in inspecting Mr. Waple's pigs, ducks, and gooseberries. But how had the miscreant contrived to effect that entrance? The spare room opened from the room in which he had eaten his lunch; it formed, in fact, the end part of that wing of the house, and was on the ground floor. There was only one door to it, and that could only be entered by passing through the bar-parlour, then through the coffee-room. Now, Laurence had good reason to suppose that Charity had been sitting in the bar-parlour, or had at least been in and out of it, during the whole time he was with her uncle about the pig-yard and the garden: she could never at any time have been far away, because Mr. Waple had intimated that in the absence of his wife and daughter she was performing their duties. She must necessarily have attended to anyone who called in at the bar; it therefore seemed an impossibility

that any person could have gained access to the bedroom without her seeing him.

Obviously, then, entrance had been effected by the window. Laurence went over to it, and examined it and its immediate location carefully. It was a square, sash window, partly open top and bottom; curtains depended from each side of it. There was no sign within the room that it had been disturbed; the curtains hung straight, and there was no mark that he could see on the window-sill or on the seat beneath it. He drew the curtains aside and looked out into the garden. Immediately beneath the window lay a narrow bed of flowers, bordered with dwarf box; beyond that was an equally narrow path of gravel, also bordered with the same shrub; above it, extending for several yards in each direction, was a high espalier of scarlet runners, just then in full leaf. Left of the window, the little gravelled path ran on to a small wicket-gate in the hedgerow which separated the garden from the high road; to the right it extended as far as the angle of the house, round which it turned abruptly. From this point to the wicket-gate anyone coming along the path from the latter would have been fully concealed from the observation

of whoever chanced to be passing along the high road at that moment; as for his being seen from the house, that seemed impossible under the particular circumstances. On that side of the wing there were only three windows—the first was that out of which Laurence was now gazing; the others, further along, lighted the coffee-room. Unless somebody—and there could be no one but Charity—had been looking out of one or other of these windows a person desirous of entering the bedroom by the window could have done so with very little risk of detection.

Laurence leant far out of the window, and looked narrowly at the little bed of flowers beneath him. It was still quite light, and he could see quite well; but he failed to make out any trace of disturbance amongst the flowers or in the box-bordering. But the flower-bed was so narrow, and the window so near the level of the ground, that nothing could be easier than for a person of even moderate height to push up the lower sash and enter the room direct from the path. That, without doubt, was how the robbery had been effected. The mysterious enemy, whoever he or she was, had certainly tracked him to the Three Travellers, found out

which was his room, and had entered it successfully while he and Mr. Waple were examining the pigs, and Charity was attending to customers.

Laurence left the window and the room and went through the coffee-room into the bar-parlour. There Mr. Waple sat in an easy-chair, a pair of spectacles on his nose, the newspaper in his hand, an appetiser for his supper in a glass at his elbow.

"Mr. Waple!" said Laurence.

Mr. Waple looked over the top of his spectacles. "Sir?" said Mr. Waple.

"Just come over here a moment, please," said Laurence, with a voice full of mystery. "I want you to look at something."

Mr. Waple elevated his seventeen stones of solid weight out of the easy-chair, and laid aside his newspaper and spectacles. Laurence, who had a sense of the humorous that would not be repressed in spite of his loss and the strange circumstances attending it, tip-toed back across the coffee-room, as if he meant to surprise something or somebody. Mr. Waple, striving to follow his example, did so about as easily as an elephant.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, sir?" whispered Mr.



Waple, as they reached the door of Laurence's room. "Anything wanted will——"

Laurence grasped Mr. Waple's stout arm and pointed dramatically to the maltreated case. "Look!" he said. "Look!"

Mr. Waple bent down and scrutinised the case with wondering eyes. Laurence's outstretched forefinger traced the straight line of the wound.

"Cut open!" he said.

It was a full minute before Mr. Waple realised the real significance of the sight then presented to him. When he did he grew purple with rage and astonishment, and the veins on his forehead became so swollen that Laurence grew afraid for him.

"Never mind," he said. "You see, it was so easy for the thieves to enter by the window."

Mr. Waple banged the fist of his right hand into the palm of his left. With a mighty effort he found his voice. "Thieves!" he exclaimed. "Thieves in——"

"Well, most probably one thief," interrupted Laurence.

"One, two, three, or three-and-twenty, sir!" vociferated Mr. Waple. "Thieves in the Three Travellers! Thieves under Tony Waple's

roof-tree! Heaven bless my soul! I can't believe it. Charity! Charity! Look'ee here, my dear, some scoundrel's been in through that there window and cut this here gentleman's leather dressing-case clean open. Must ha' been done with a razor, by the looks on it. And under my roof, too! What's the rascalion got away with, sir—money or jewellery?"

Laurence shook his head, and looked at Charity with a smile. "No," he answered. "I shouldn't have minded that. He's stolen a secret."

"A secret?" said Mr. Waple, evidently mystified.

At the sound of her name, bellowed forth so loudly that it might have been heard half-way to Canterbury, Charity, who had obviously been smartening herself up for supper, came hastening from some far-off part of the house, to find Mr. Waple stamping up and down Laurence's room, and alternately shaking his fist at the window and pummelling his other hand with it. At sight of his niece he burst out afresh.

"Charity, my girl, never was such a thing!"

"Well, not quite the whole of the secret, but

pretty nearly the whole—more than I wanted any living soul to know, at any rate,” answered Laurence. “I told you I had valuable papers in that case—well, he’s stolen them.”

Mr. Waple, who seemed relieved to hear that no solid coin of the realm was missing, sat down on the bed and, still gazing steadfastly at the case, began to mop his forehead.

“Was there any money in that there secret, sir?” he inquired.

“Only an enormous fortune,” replied Laurence, laconically. “That’s why I don’t want to share it with anyone.”

“Of course not,” said Mr. Waple. “But what licks me is—why did the thief set to his job here at the Three Travellers?”

“He must have tracked me here and watched his opportunity,” answered Laurence. He turned to Charity, who was inspecting the injured case with great concern. “You did not see any suspicious people about when Mr. Waple was showing me his pigs, did you, Miss Charity?” he asked.

“No,” replied Charity, blushing a little at the way in which, for the first time, he pronounced her name. “No, I have seen no one whom I did not know except a couple of

harvesters who were seeking work in the hay-fields. No one could possibly have entered this room without my knowledge—that is, through the bar and the coffee-room.”

“Oh, the thief came through the window,” said Laurence. “There’s no doubt about that, Miss Charity. He’s a clever fellow, that thief. This is the second time he has stolen my documents.”

“What !” exclaimed Mr. Waple. “The second time, sir? There must be something uncommon particular about ’em.”

“There is something very uncommonly particular about them, Mr. Waple,” replied Laurence. “They contain the secret—or nearly all of it—of one of the most marvellous inventions ever known to science. If the thief is clever enough to supply the one little detail which is not there—well, then, my great fortune will fall into other hands.”

“Let’s hope not, sir ; let’s hope not,” said Mr. Waple, heartily. “But now, sir, much as it goes against my grain, what about informing the police? The man as done this can’t be far away.”

Laurence shook his head. “No,” he said ; “that’s no good. The man who’s done this

is too clever for the police. He'll be safe enough by this time—reading my papers. Never mind just now. I'm troubled, but it won't affect my appetite for supper, Miss Charity."

And there being nothing more to do just then, Mr. Waple said that was an uncommonly sensible remark, and he was glad to hear it; and so they all three went to supper, which turned out to be a couple of ducks, as tender and toothsome, said Mr. Waple, as a sucking-pig.



## CHAPTER V

As he wound up his watch that night before retiring to rest Laurence involuntarily laughed.

“ After all,” he said to himself, “ whoever he is, or whoever they are, he or they haven’t got everything! He or they are no doubt anathematising me at this moment for omitting the one little necessary thing. Quite so—but I can keep that one little necessary thing in my own brain. But if they, having everything but that, should discover or hit upon that!—what then for me? ”

This, to one of less sanguine temperament, less determination, would have seemed a terrible prospect. But Laurence possessed more than the usual allowance of doggedness and unflinching purpose, and just as he had not permitted his loss to interfere with his enjoyment of his supper and his subsequent chat with Mr. Waple, who discoursed on pigs while his guest smoked a cigar and his niece occupied herself with fancy-work, so he did not allow it to drive

sleep away from him. And he went to sleep thinking about—Charity. For, in spite of his soldier-like face and square jaw, he was a very impressionable young man, and Mr. Waple's niece was a very prepossessing young woman.

When Laurence arose next morning he found that his host had departed on a pig-buying round, and that Charity was preparing to go into the city on a shopping errand for the benefit of the Three Travellers. Laurence, with a shamelessness that was quite apparent, caught readily at this as an excuse for enjoying Charity's society.

"Ah, that is exactly what I, too, must do!" he exclaimed. "Since my poor little port-manteau—brand new, too!—is destroyed for ever by the miscreant who stole my papers, I must provide myself with another. Perhaps you will show me where I can buy one, Miss Charity? In return, I will carry your basket."

"I do not know that I am going to carry a basket," said Charity. "And if I did, you could not carry it."

"No?" he said, inquiringly.

"Gentlemen do not carry baskets in England," she explained.

"Not?" he said. "I have often gone to

market with my mother and carried the basket."

"Yes, but that was in Germany," she said. "Here you must not carry a basket, nor a brown paper parcel."

"All the same," he said, pleadingly, "you will take me to the portmanteau-maker's shop?"

She looked at him gravely for a time, then she smiled as if he were some spoilt child who asked to be humoured.

"Very well," she replied.

Laurence might have been the lightest-hearted man in the world when they set out. He hummed and whistled snatches of songs, English or German, and made comments on the things they saw in such gay fashion that his companion wondered at his seeming indifference to the event of the previous evening.

"You take your loss very lightly, Mr. Workman," she said suddenly.

Laurence looked at her. He became serious. "Don't think me frivolous or indifferent to my loss," he said. "I assure you I am neither. But I am naturally of a sanguine temperament, and I certainly agree with the proverb which tells you that it is no good crying over spilt milk.

All the tears and groans in the world won't give me back my plans and as much of my secret as was in them."

"Were they of such great value?" she asked.

"Indeed they were," he answered, earnestly. "There is no secret as to what they were; they were the particulars, specifications, drawings, all sorts of things, relative to a new motor for aeroplanes—a motor which will literally eclipse anything of its sort that has ever been known. With my motor it will be possible to fly the Atlantic."

"And if the man, or the people, who stole your papers——"

"Very fortunately," he said, interrupting her, "the secret of the secret is not in the papers—it is in my head. But with the papers in his possession it is not impossible for a very clever mechanic or engineer to guess at that secret, to hit upon it in a moment of rare inspiration."

"I suppose you have been working at this a long time?" she asked.

"Oh, a long time," he answered. "You must know that I am a civil engineer, as is also my father. That was why he left England seventeen years ago, to become manager to the Berlin

branch of the great firm of Armadales, Limited—yes?”

For Charity had uttered a sharp exclamation of surprise, and had half turned to him.

“Armadales, Limited?” she said. “Do you mean Armadales of London, Berlin, and New York?”

“Exactly,” replied Laurence. “My father is the Berlin manager, and since I left school I have been employed in their works. You have heard of them, then?”

Charity smiled. “I am clerk to Sir Herbert Armadale’s private secretary,” she said. “I, too, have been in the Armadales’ employ ever since I left school.”

Laurence stared at her in astonishment. “Then you do not reside with Mr. Waple?” he said. “You do not live here?”

“Oh no, I live in London,” she answered. “You see, I and my brother are orphans, and Uncle Tony was very good to us—is very good to us, and so when his wife—she is his second wife—goes away, I contrive to get my holidays at the same time, so that I can come down and keep house for him.”

Laurence became thoughtful. “I am glad you live in London,” he said, suddenly. “I,



too, am going to London. Now I shall be able to see you."

There was something so very confident, and at the same time so exceedingly innocent, about this naïve remark that Charity laughed.

"But London is a very big place," she said.

"Not so big that I shall not be able to find you," he replied.

"But perhaps—perhaps—you have not asked me if you might come to see me," she said, smiling in spite of her blushes.

"Oh, but I must!" he said. "Of course I must. Why, wouldn't you like me to?"

Charity laughed outright. "Perhaps I should," she admitted, fixing her attention very closely on the opposite side of the way.

"Why, of course," said Laurence. "And then you will introduce me to your brother, and we will all be friends."

Charity's face grew wistful. "That would be nice, I think, for my brother," she said. "He does not see many people. He is a cripple."

Laurence turned and gave her a look of sudden comprehension. "And you have to work for both?" he said. "Ah, I understand!"

"I am proud to do it," she said, quickly. "He is a good boy, my poor Dickie, and very

patient ; but he will never be strong, and there is little that he can do."

"I shall make friends with him," announced Laurence, with decision. "I will talk to him and amuse him."

Charity smiled at his eagerness. "Are you always impulsive?" she asked, somewhat mischievously.

"Impulsive? Am I impulsive?" he said. "I did not know. Perhaps I say what I think and feel."

"Without doubt," she laughed.

"But what a marvellous thing!" exclaimed Laurence, going off at another tangent. "What a wonderful thing that you and I should be connected with the same firm! It is as if—as if it made a bond between us."

"Nonsense!" said Charity. "It's a mere coincidence. I don't know how many people there aren't in the London offices."

"And in the other offices, too," said Laurence. "But I don't believe in coincidences. There isn't such a thing in science, and I don't believe there is in life. No," he continued, in solemn fashion, "I believe we were destined to meet. I felt it to be so when I entered the Three Travellers and saw you sitting at the table, and

experienced such a confusion that I could not speak."

"This is where I have to give some orders," said Charity, hastily, and escaped into a fishmonger's shop. She was not unaccustomed to young men, but Laurence was something of a puzzle—he spoke with such simple directness and earnestness, and was so very boyishly candid as to prove rather disconcerting. She was still blushing when she came out again into the sunlight and met his eager gaze.

"I will show you where you can buy a portmanteau," she said. "And you must not carry it—they will send it to you."

"Ah, you think I am very un-English!" he said.

"Very, when you talk about destinies," she answered, smiling. "You see, I am a perfect Philistine, and only laugh at your sentimentalism. But you will become a good Englishman all in good time, Mr. Workman, if you don't jump at conclusions."

Laurence was about to make another impulsive reply to this half-jesting remark when he suddenly caught sight of M. L'Abbé Bremond.

## CHAPTER VI

M. Bremond, a figure unfamiliar to English eyes in his soutane, girdle, wide-brimmed hat, and silver-buckled shoes, stood, his capacious umbrella still with him, on the steps of an hotel across the street which Laurence and Charity were then traversing. He was engaged in conversation with a man whose back was towards them, but who, from the appearance of his well-cut suit of grey tweed, was evidently an Englishman.

"Ah, there is M. L'Abbé Bremond!" exclaimed Laurence. "What a boor he must think me! I promised to call at his hotel at nine o'clock last night, and I forgot all about it. Please excuse my absence for a moment while I make my apologies to him."

He ran across the street and up the steps of the hotel. M. Bremond saw him, and held out a hand; Laurence burst into profuse apologies for his seeming discourtesy.

"But indeed, M. L'Abbé," he said, "I have

some excuse, for, first of all, I found myself in a most charming English inn, with very pleasant company, and then I had a startling adventure, and altogether the evening was over before I knew that it had begun. All the same——”

“And as it was, my friend, you would not have found me here,” broke in M. Bremond. “I did not arrive in Canterbury until this morning, quite a short time ago. You have seen something of the beauties of the old city by this time, no doubt?”

“Only in a general way, M. L’Abbé. I was hoping,” said Laurence, with his unconsciously ingratiating smile, “to have the great privilege of enjoying your guidance”

“And that, I am sorry to say, I cannot now give you,” said M. Bremond. “I have had to alter my arrangements, and I am leaving Canterbury this afternoon for the country seat of an old friend, Sir Herbert Armadale, who is very anxious for my immediate presence, though I do not know why. Otherwise I should——”

“Sir Herbert Armadale!” exclaimed Laurence, interrupting M. Bremond. “Dear me! That is the second time to-day, too. Why, M. L’Abbé,” he continued, “that half persuades me to believe in coincidences. I have a letter of introduction



to Sir Herbert Armadale from his brother, my late employer."

Upon hearing this the gentleman to whom M. Bremond had been talking, and who had stood a little apart during the conversation between him and Laurence, turned sharply and favoured the young engineer with a sharp stare. The ecclesiastic also regarded him with renewed interest.

"Indeed, my friend?" he said. "Eh, well, this gentleman is an intimate friend and associate in business of Sir Herbert—in fact, he and I journey to Hurstdene Manor in company this afternoon."

"M. L'Abbé," said Laurence, "although I am English I have never lived in England since childhood, and you know the conventions better than I. Would it be permissible to present my letter of introduction to Sir Herbert Armadale at his country house, since it is so near, or must I keep it for his business offices in London?"

The man in the grey tweed suit anticipated M. Bremond's answer. He had been examining Laurence with curious, critical glances; now, as he spoke, Laurence inspected him. He was a man out of the common; of that Laurence was sure. Something above the medium height,

he was of a sinewy, supple figure, the lines of which conveyed an impression of great strength of the steel-and-whipcord order. But while his figure was noticeable, his face was much more so. It was one of those faces which look as if they had been carved out of stone or marble, and when once fixed seem mask-like in their rigidity. It was almost colourless; the mouth was straight, hard, unduly wide; the nose was crag-like in size and shape; the chin square and aggressive. Out of the pallid, wax-like face stared two brightly-burning black eyes, which looked at anything upon which they were directed with peculiar intensity.

"I will take it upon myself to answer that question," said this person. "I am not only Sir Herbert Armadale's partner in business, but his bosom friend, and if you are, as I believe, Mr. Laurence Workman, I can assure you that he will be delighted to see you at Hurstdene Manor."

"Yes, I am Laurence Workman," answered Laurence, much surprised.

"And I am Sir John Bedford," said the other. "Of course, you have heard my name in connection with the business. Take my advice, Mr. Workman, and come with M. Bremond

and myself in my motor to Hurstdene after lunch."

But Laurence hesitated. He had seen Charity vanish round the corner of the street, and he was impatient to rejoin her, for he felt that he had already kept her waiting too long.

"I should prefer to remain in Canterbury until to-morrow, I think," he said. "But if you think Sir Herbert would receive me, then——"

"I repeat that I can assure you of a warm welcome, Mr. Workman," said Sir John Bedford. "We have heard a good deal of you from our Berlin management, and I know that Sir Herbert is anxious to see you."

"Then to-morrow," said Laurence, and made his adieux and went off to rejoin Charity.

His manner was very elated, and when he had apologised to her for his delay, he spoke with considerable gratification of the meeting. "All the same," he said, "I refuse to believe in your theory of coincidence. No, it is destiny."

"What do you think of Sir John Bedford?" she asked, quietly.

Something in her tone made Laurence turn and look at her. She did not return his glance,

but kept her eyes fixed steadily on some point ahead of them.

"Ah," said Laurence, "I see that you know him, and do not like him."

"Why, of course I know him," she said. "As he is a partner in Armadales' I naturally see him rather often. No, I don't like him, and I don't think anybody at Armadales' likes him."

"Why?" asked Laurence.

Charity shook her head. "Probably for the same reason that the man in the rhyme didn't like Dr. Fell," she replied. "I certainly don't know of any reason why I don't like Sir John Bedford, but I don't."

"He seems a clever man," said Laurence.

"He is a clever man," she answered, with emphasis. "If you get to know anything of Armadales over here you will find that Sir John is the moving factor of the business. Sir Herbert Armadale is much influenced by him; we all know that Sir John Bedford controls the business."

Then, remarking that it was time she returned to the Three Travellers, she brought the shopping expedition to an end, and they returned to Mr. Waple's hospitable roof, under which Laurence passed another afternoon and night with great

contentment to himself. He took quite a friendly leave of Mr. Waple next morning, and promised to visit him again some day; of Charity, Mr. Waple being present, his leave-taking was quite formal, if very cordial. But he carried her London address away with him in his pocket-book.

That afternoon found Laurence driving through a typical English park towards an equally typical English country house. Hurstdene Manor, the great engineer's country seat, is one of the most picturesque and charming places in Kent—an old Elizabethan manor-house, set in the loveliest of sylvan surroundings. Such of its red brick as can be seen—for the greater part of its walls is covered with ivy—has been toned by age to a soft mellowness of colour; the ornamental gardens which lie at the foot of its long, south-west terrace are noted for their wealth of shrub and flower; from the terrace itself there is one of the finest views in the county. Laurence was much impressed by his first glimpse of Sir Herbert Armadale's seat; the Armadale he knew, Robert Armadale, head of the Berlin branch of the business, was content with a mansion in one of the best parts of the German capital; but this—why this, he

said to himself as he approached the house, was a demesne fit for some great lord. He became curious to see its master.

It was quite evident that Sir Herbert Armadale was expecting him, for he was immediately conducted by an obsequious footman to the baronet's study. Laurence gazed with some curiosity at the man he had come to see. He saw a tall, grey-haired man of kindly, amiable, but—as he thought—weak expression, who smiled upon him with good nature, which seemed to spring from a natural liking to be good-natured because of the mere easiness of it, and gave him a hand-shake which was welcoming but flabby. Laurence saw no likeness in this polite old gentleman to his brother in Berlin, and he began to wonder how Sir Herbert Armadale's world-wide reputation had been built up. And then he remembered what Charity had said about Sir John Bedford.

Sir Herbert was all polite cordiality to his caller. He had been greatly interested in hearing from Sir John Bedford of the meeting between the latter and Laurence on the previous day in Canterbury, and he was very glad that Laurence had called to see him so soon after his arrival in England. He had heard—often



—of him from his brother Robert, who had informed him of his, Laurence's, powers. And now that he was here he would, of course, stay a night or two on his way to London.

Laurence protested. He had no fitting clothes—all his luggage was awaiting him in London; he had no more with him than a change or two of linen.

“No matter—no matter!” said Sir Herbert. “We will dispense with all ceremony. There is no one here but M. Bremond, Sir John Bedford, and my ward, Miss Delomosne, who sometimes plays hostess for me. Of course you must stay, Mr. Workman. You know Sir John Bedford by name, of course; as to M. Bremond, although he is a priest he is one of the greatest living authorities on hydrostatics—you will be interested in him. By-the-by, I understand that you have gone in a good deal for invention. Have you brought anything good with you to London?”

“I brought the papers relating to something which I believe to be more than good, Sir Herbert,” replied Laurence, “but, oddly enough, I was robbed of them two nights ago.” And he proceeded to tell the baronet of his loss, Sir Herbert listening with great interest,

especially to the description of the theft. "Fortunately," he continued, "the actual secret has never been put on paper—it remains in my brain. Yet someone might chance upon it, and then, in conjunction with my papers——"

"Let us hope not," Sir Herbert said. "Let us hope not. But come, Mr. Workman; Miss Delomosne will be giving our guests some tea on the lawn—come and be introduced to her, and join in our English five o'clock."

Laurence had no objection to this proposal, and he followed Sir Herbert across numerous rooms, and along various corridors, until they emerged upon a smooth lawn, gaily bordered with flowers. And there, chatting vivaciously with M. L'Abbé Bremond, he saw, presiding at a tea-table, the hawk-eyed lady with whom he had crossed from Ostend.

## CHAPTER VII

Brought face to face with two people who during the past two days had entered somewhat mysteriously into his life, Laurence felt as if he had fallen amongst old friends.

"But there is no need to introduce me, Sir Herbert," he said. "M. L'Abbé Bremond I already knew, and this lady——"

"Miss Delomosne," said Sir Herbert.

"She and I, too, have met," continued Laurence, gazing at Miss Delomosne with a half-critical, half whimsical expression. "And I wondered, Miss Delomosne, when I saw you enter the train at Dover, if I should ever see you again."

"That, Mr. Workman, seems to imply that you did wish to see me again," said Miss Delomosne, laughing. "Let me give you some tea."

"Why, of course I did wish to see you again," replied Laurence. "One always wants to see anyone whom one meets and is interested in—don't you think so, M. L'Abbé?"

"Quite true—quite true, my friend," responded M. Bremond. "And I am glad to see that you are one of those very rare young gentlemen who in this blasé age take an interest in their fellow-creatures. It is—yes, quite refreshing."

Laurence, with a mouth full of cucumber sandwich, gave the ecclesiastic a stare of wonder. "But, M. L'Abbé," he said, with the inquiring look of an innocent child, "is this age so blasé? Of course, I am quite young, and know very little, but it seems to me that instead of the age being what you say, it is something quite different—that it is waking up. Besides, why should one be tired of a thing which one has only just had a look at?"

"It is a great thing to have courage—and determination," said M. Bremond. "You appear to have both, Mr. Workman."

"Oh," said Laurence, "yes, indeed, M. L'Abbé. I shall sail to the stars—it was born in me. Possibly I shall fall a good many times, but what then? I shall get up and go on again."

"And supposing," said Miss Delomosne—"supposing that in one of those falls you were—smashed?"

"Ah, well, then of course," replied Laurence, "then—why, that would be the end. But I don't mean to be smashed," he added. "You see, I've got to do something; and if one's got an object—a big ambition—one doesn't die, one doesn't go under, until one's achieved—eh?"

The three people watching this very confident, evidently very self-resourceful young man, were impressed by him in varying degrees. Sir Herbert Armadale, master of industry, with a long past of effort, found something in Laurence's almost aggressive self-assertion which he himself dimly remembered being in possession of many a long year ago. As for M. Bremond, his thoughts were of a complex nature. Here, he said to himself, is a young man full of the joy and capacity of life, of an ardent, enthusiastic temperament, his whole soul singing within him because of his enthusiasm, candid almost to foolishness, frank because of his belief in his own powers. M. Bremond's grave, austere face softened as he looked at Laurence. After all, he thought, there is nothing so beautiful in life as youth. And, quite unconsciously, he and Sir Herbert Armadale sighed; the meridian was passed for

them, but for this young man it was still that wonderful hour which comes before sunrise.

So much for the thoughts of the two elderly men. What of the thoughts of the woman? Miss Delomosne had been inspecting Laurence all the time, just as she had inspected him on the *Princess Elizabeth*. And as he sat there drinking cups of tea, and helping himself to anything that he happened to take a sudden liking to, she said to herself: "This is a man who is also a child. He doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve, but he'll show it without reserve to whoever wants to see it. And yet—yet——" Then she paused to think; and while she thought she watched the unconscious eater of plum-cake—two pieces of which he had just appropriated, with a remark that he had never eaten English plum-cake before. "Yes," she thought, continuing her train of thought, "a child—a mere nobody—but awkward to deal with if the occasion arose," she decided. And going back to Laurence's last remark, and keeping her keen, scrutinising eyes fixed on his, she said aloud:

"And your great secret for that achievement, Mr. Workman?"

Laurence looked up at her from the depths of the chair in which he was taking his ease.



His eyes twinkled with amusement—amusement in which there was a trace of mischievousness.

“Did I say that I had a secret?” he asked her.

She smiled at him—for his own exclusive benefit—and bent towards him from her tea-table. “How did the dressing-case and the steel chain go on?” she said.

Sir Herbert Armadale caught this question, and turned to Miss Delomosne with a wondering look.

“Dressing-case! Steel chain! My dear child, what are you talking of? One might think,” he went on, “that you and our young friend were mixed up in some mysterious romance!”

“Perhaps we are,” said Miss Delomosne. “What do you think, Mr. Workman?”

Laurence set down his cup, took a cigar which his host offered him, and made a face expressive of infinite comprehension.

“I shouldn’t wonder at all if we are,” he said. “But, then, you know, the whole world is full of romance. You’ve only got to go round the next corner to find it. It seems trite, inutile, to repeat what is obvious; but there you are!

You, Miss Delomosne, trip over the threshold of the stairway—you lose your magazines, your newspapers ; I pick them up——”

“With one hand !” she said, laughing.

“And then,” Laurence continued, “we become acquainted—we immediately know each other. Now, if I had been a knight, clad in armour——”

“I reminded you that you wore a steel chain,” she interrupted.

“Clad in armour,” he went on, “and riding through a haunted wood, and had met you, wandering and alone, that would have been considered of the true essence of romance.”

Miss Delomosne looked at him with a thoughtfulness in which there was a certain sort of challenge.

“And the steel chain ?” she said.

Laurence took a long pull at his cigar, and gazed steadfastly at the top of a great yew-tree which stood across the lawn.

“Ah, yes !” he said, lazily. “The steel chain, Miss Delomosne, to be sure. Well then, here it is !” He drew a long, slender chain of steel links from his pocket and dangled it in front of her. “Behold !” he said.

Sir Herbert Armadale and M. Bremond

exchanged glances. Then they looked, first at Miss Delomosne, secondly at Laurence.

"What is this extraordinary mystery?" asked Sir Herbert.

"Ah!" replied Miss Delomosne, pointing to Laurence. "That is the mystery! Romance, indeed! Figure to yourself, then, M. L'Abbé, a young and impressionable woman, with a head full of all sorts of ideas, who, in making a very commonplace crossing from Ostend to Dover, comes in contact with a young man who is so mysterious that he carries with him a dressing-case which is attached to his left arm and wrist by a steel chain! And who tells one"—she shot a quick, humorous glance at Laurence—"who tells one that therein or therewith lies his fortune."

"I am still at a loss to know what you are talking about, Lilian," said Sir Herbert.

"Miss Delomosne, sir, wants me to explain," said Laurence. "Like all women—M. L'Abbé will correct me if I am wrong, for, as I said just now, I am young and ignorant—Miss Delomosne is inquisitive. She desires to know the solution of what is to her a mystery. But then, you see, there isn't any mystery. It is all so very plain—so very straightforward. Miss

Delomosne sees me on board a steam-packet with a dressing-case attached to my left arm by this steel chain. I inform Miss Delomosne—by suggestion merely—that I thus fasten my personal property to myself because I am absent-minded, and am apt to lay things down and forget them. Miss Delomosne immediately scents some romance.”

“Where,” said Miss Delomosne—“where is the fortune?”

“The fortune,” replied Laurence, tapping his forehead, “is here, Miss Delomosne. All the same, I was robbed of some beginnings of it within twenty-four hours of reaching England.”

Laurence’s three listeners turned to him with renewed interest. He paid no attention to them, but went on talking, as if to himself.

“Yes,” he said; “that’s a strange thing. I can’t make it out. Romance, now?—yes, I’m sure there’s a lot of romance about this. It’s the queerest——”

“Well?” said Miss Delomosne.

Laurence woke out of his reverie, glanced at Miss Delomosne, passed her over, and turned to Sir Herbert Armadale and M. Bremond.

“Yes, it’s queer!” he said. “You see, Sir

Herbert, I've been tremendously interested in aviation ever since I was a boy, and in my spare time, while I was in your firm's works in Germany, I employed myself in endeavouring to solve a certain problem which has so far baffled everybody. Well, I've solved it—and I don't believe that anyone else ever will. But—and here is what I can't understand—somebody has some knowledge of what I am doing. A year ago somebody stole my papers from my own room in my father's house—stole them in the most mysterious fashion. The day before yesterday, when I had taken a room in a little inn in Canterbury, somebody cut my dressing-case open and abstracted my papers again. Somebody! I should like to know who that somebody is; he is uncommonly clever. And how he, or she, or they, ever became possessed of the knowledge that I was engaged in this particular research I cannot tell, for I have scarcely ever spoken of it, even to my own parents."

"And if——" began M. Bremond.

"Ah, yes, M. L'Abbé, I anticipate you," said Laurence. "You mean if the thief or thieves can make use of my secret? Well, possibly—yes, if they can command a man of exceptional

genius who can just supply the hiatus which I have purposely left."

"Then your papers are not complete?" said Miss Delomosne.

Laurence flicked the ash from his cigar and, looking at his interrogator, smiled in something of an exasperating manner, and he accompanied his smile with what very nearly approached to a wink.

"Not quite, Miss Delomosne," he said. "No; they go to nineteen points out of twenty. The twentieth point I carry in my head."



## CHAPTER VIII

To Laurence's last confident remark no one made immediate reply, but after a brief period of silence Miss Delomosne said :

"In that case, then, the robbery has not been of any serious moment to you."

"Oh, but I can't say that, though," answered Laurence. "You see—Sir Herbert, as a practical engineer, will understand me—there is so much in my papers that will help any rival in the same pursuit. In possession of them he is, as I said a few minutes ago, in command of nineteen points out of twenty, and, therefore, is helped to that extent. And that it is some unknown rival who has robbed me on both these occasions I am sure."

"Did you go to the police at Canterbury?" asked Sir Herbert.

"No, I did not," replied Laurence. "Having regard to the circumstances, what could I tell the police? I do not even suspect anyone. I have no doubt that the thief tracked me from

my father's house in Berlin to the Three Travellers, and there very adroitly cut the dressing-case open. But—who was he?”

“Obviously somebody who was acquainted with your ambitions and intentions,” said M. Bremond. “Was there no one in your confidence—no fellow-employee, for instance, who knew what you were working at?”

Laurence considered matters. “No, M. L'Abbé,” he replied. “I do not think there was. Of course, some of my associates knew that I was experimenting, but they did not know what it was on. I gave away no confidences.”

“Quite a mystery,” remarked Sir Herbert. “However, I think that if I were you I should go to the police at Scotland Yard on arriving in London, though I confess that I do not see what clue you can give them.”

“Very well; I will see them this evening, Sir Herbert,” said Laurence.

“Oh, not this evening, nor to-morrow,” answered his host. “Now that you are here you must remain with us a day or two. Sir John Bedford, my partner, will be here this evening—he was obliged to go up to town this morning, and he particularly wishes to have

some conversation with you. The fact is, Mr. Workman," he continued, "we have heard such excellent accounts of your powers from the Berlin branch that Sir John and I are desirous of making you an offer for your services here. Stay and hear what he has got to say; he deals with that part of the business more than I do."

Laurence heard this with some surprise. On his leaving the Armadales in Germany nothing had been said of his employment by them in England.

"That is very kind of you, Sir Herbert," he said. "I had no idea of any such offer being made to me. And, to tell you the truth, it was my intention in coming here to devote myself entirely to my invention and its introduction on the market."

"Perhaps we could be of great use to you that way," said Sir Herbert. "We have exceptional facilities. Be persuaded to stay at any rate the week-end, and talk to Sir John."

"But I have no clothes, no linen here," said Laurence. "Everything awaits me at the Charing Cross Hotel."

"That," said Sir Herbert, rising, "is the easiest matter in the world. Come with me

to the house, and I will send a motor into London for what you need; it will be there and back within two hours—we are only eighteen miles out. And while it is going I will show you our gardens.”

Laurence could see no reasonable cause for refusing a hospitality as generously offered as it was unexpected; he had no particular reason for an immediate arrival in London, and the novelty and charm of even a few days' visit to an English country-house where there was congenial society to meet appealed strongly to him. He accordingly accepted Sir Herbert's invitation, and repaired with him to the house to make the necessary arrangements, leaving Miss Delomosne and the Abbé *tête-à-tête* by the tea-table. M. Bremond folded his hands over the rich gold cross which hung from his waistcoat, and looked with half-closed eyes after Laurence's retreating figure.

“That,” he said, slowly, “is a young man of great ingenuousness—he is very simple, natural, and unreserved.”

“And at the same time somewhat deep,” said Miss Delomosne.

“Yes,” said M. Bremond. “Yes. Absolute candour and frankness are sometimes

accompanied by depth of that sort. Innocent and ingenuous as he is, I do not think anyone would take what the English call 'a rise' out of him."

"Not if rod, line, and bait were in full view," said his companion.

"Ah!" said M. Bremond, turning in his chair and favouring Miss Delomosne with a scrutinising look. "That is very good. Just so! No, a carefully-concealed bait, you think?"

"Very carefully concealed indeed," said Miss Delomosne.

M. Bremond unclasped his hands and, extracting an elegant gold-mounted snuff-box from a waistcoat pocket, took a pinch with great enjoyment.

"I fancy," he remarked drily, "that the young man is—impressionable."

"Impressed by my own sex, I suppose you mean?" said the lady.

"Just so," replied M. Bremond. "He looks upon feminine beauty with the eyes of youthful enthusiasm."

Miss Delomosne picked up a piece of fancy-work from a table at her side and began to stitch at it.

"I noticed that he stared very hard at one,"

she remarked. "And he has very fine and penetrating eyes."

M. Bremond smiled reflectively. "Ah!" he said, in his slow, somewhat cynical fashion. "You observed that? Yes—I, too. Unobserved by the young man, I witnessed him making full use of them in Canterbury, where he was walking with a very comely young woman of the true English type—they had evidently lost little time in striking up a friendship. But the heart of youth is hasty, precipitate. Perhaps it is well."

"Oh, I don't think it matters, Abbé," said Miss Delomosne, carelessly. "There's an old proverb here to the effect that the young will be young."

"So I have heard," responded M. Bremond, drily. "I fancy the sentiment is by no means confined to England."

"I daresay not," replied his companion. "I don't remember that I ever felt particularly young, though. Now I regard myself as an old woman, of course."

M. Bremond looked at her half whimsically, and tapped his elegant snuff-box. "At twenty?"

"Twenty-one, to be exact, Abbé," she replied.



The Abbé smiled. "I have known people—of both sexes—who were quite grave and reserved seniors at nineteen, and had become frivolous kittens within another year," he said. "I suppose falling in love has something to do with it."

"Possibly," said Miss Delomosne. "I will wait until I fall in love to see if that is so. At present I feel very ancient and old-maidish."

Then, remarking that as they were to entertain the young inventor she must find the housekeeper and give orders for his rooms to be prepared, she gathered up her work and went slowly across the lawn, M. Bremond, out of half-closed eyes, admiring the undeniable grace of her movements and the beauty of her figure.

"A fine woman," he said to himself; "a very fine woman!"

He remained, comfortably seated in his garden-chair, enjoying the soft summer breeze, scented with the mingled odours of the flower-beds, and the belts of fir and pine which shut in the pleasure-grounds, until the sound of a rapidly-approaching motor roused him from a reverie. He looked up and saw Sir John Bedford arriving, and raised a hand to him with

a gesture which signified an invitation to join him.

Sir John alighted at the porch, gave some order to a footman who met him there, and presently walked across the lawn towards M. Bremond, followed by the footman carrying a tray furnished with a decanter, a syphon, glasses, and cigars. He nodded to the Abbé, mixed himself a drink, lighted a cigar, and dropped into a chair at the other's side.

"Well," he said, when the footman had gone away, "is he here?"

"Armadales is showing him the gardens," replied M. Bremond.

"And is he going to remain?" asked Sir John.

"For a few days, at any rate," said M. Bremond.

Sir John took a long pull at the contents of his glass, and nodded satisfaction. "That's right," he said. "Now, about Sabatier? Have you seen him to-day?"

"Not since this morning, when I placed the documents with him," replied M. Bremond. "He wished to be left entirely alone until half-past five."

Sir John looked at his watch. "It's twenty-

five past now," he said. "Come along; I'm anxious to know if he's made anything out."

The two men crossed the lawn, went round the west wing of the house, and presently, in a very quiet corner of the gardens, came to a turret-door which M. Bremond unlocked with a key taken from his pocket, and locked again when they had passed through. Following a winding stair, the steps of which were considerably worn, they came at last to a door at the extreme head of the stairs—a door fashioned of sturdy-looking oak studded with stout iron nails.

On this door Sir John knocked three times. At the third time it opened, and a man confronted them from within.

## CHAPTER IX

The individual thus revealed to M. Bremond and Sir John Bedford was of curious, unusual, but eminently striking appearance. Something under the middle height of men, he was slightly hunchbacked, and had the stoop which denotes the student and scholar. While his legs were short and anything but symmetrical, his arms were of extraordinary length, and when held straight down at his sides extended beneath his knees, thus giving him something of the appearance of a great ape or a gorilla. But all who looked upon his face and head quickly forgot his ill-shapen body. The head, massive and beautifully formed, was covered with what was usually a shock of thick black curling hair, an equally black, magnificent beard descended from his cheeks and chin, and covered his breast to his waist. Out of this hairy mass projected an aquiline nose, finely-shaped; out of it, too, gleamed a pair of large, luminous eyes, bright as stars on a dark night. The lines of the mouth, indicated only by the curves of

a moustache that had evidently not known razor or scissors, were proud, commanding, mutinous ; the whole face, the leonine head, denoted that this was no common man. Just now he did not look in a particularly good temper. He glared at his visitors in silence, then sullenly stood aside, and motioned them to enter with an impatient movement of his hand.

The room thus entered evidently formed the topmost chamber of the turret-tower. Its walls were of unlined, uncoloured stone ; its roof was vaulted and groined ; the furniture in it was oak, of great age. The windows were mere loopholes, leaded and glazed, but on the south side a modern window had been broken out, and commanded a wide-spreading view of the sylvan glories of Hurstdene Park. Before this window stood a large square table and an elbow-chair ; the former was covered with papers, plans, drawings ; the floor on each side of the chair was similarly littered with scraps, torn and untorn, on which the occupant of the room had evidently made innumerable calculations. Although it was summer a fire of pine logs burnt in the ancient fireplace, and the atmosphere was scented with the aromatic smell of the charred embers.

Sir John stepped towards the table, and looked round him. "Well, Sabatier," he asked, "what progress?"

The man with the great head threw himself into a chair near the fireplace, and thrust his mighty hands into the pockets of his trousers. He made a grimace of disgust. "Curse it—none as yet!" he replied. "None!"

"And you have been at it all day?"

"All day," answered Sabatier, impatiently. "Of course! Do you think I should have remained in this dungeon doing nothing?"

"Of course you have been attended to?" asked Sir John.

Sabatier pointed in silence to the remains of what seemed to have been a very *recherché* meal which lay on a side table.

"Well, that's right," said Sir John. "Have a cigar. Now, what's the difficulty?"

Sabatier took a cigar, bit off and spat out the end, and blew a big cloud of smoke into the air.

"Difficulty!" he exclaimed. "Mon Dieu! I do not know what difficulty there isn't. You give me all particulars, but one, of another man's creation, and ask me to deduce from them what that one final and grand particular is! A task of the most gigantic, I tell you!"



"There is no one in Europe who can perform it but Paul Sabatier," said M. Bremond, quietly, but with a tone that was full of delicate flattery.

Sabatier's eyes flashed a little at the compliment. "That's as may be, monsieur," he said. "Perhaps I agree with you. But the task—you do not comprehend its vast nature!"

"We do," said Sir John Bedford, "or we shouldn't have called you in."

The specialist's great beard was twisted with a wry turn of his mouth and chin. "I am not omnipotent, any more than I am infallible," he answered. "I understand all that there is in these papers except the secret of secrets. Let the man tell me what it is, and I will tell you what everything is. As things are, those things," he continued, pointing carelessly, half-contemptuously, to the papers and drawings, "are the members of a body which lacks the brain. Give me the brain, and I will put all the rest together for you."

"Can't you deduce the brain from what you have already got, Sabatier?" suggested Sir John Bedford.

"Parbleu!" said Sabatier. "Frankly, messieurs, I do not think that I can. Of course I will make further endeavours—I will strive to

earn my fee. But I will explain—you are both of you sufficiently acquainted with the problem to comprehend me if I make myself simple. Now, the secret which I cannot deduce from these papers is: What is the exact nature and application of the motive power to be used in this case? Of this I am certain—it is something hitherto absolutely unknown. I am also certain of another thing—that if it appears to be what is here foreshadowed, no such aerial machine as this has ever been seen in the world. It will change everything! Now attend while I explain the lines on which I have examined these details.”

But at the end of a long explanation they were no nearer to a solution of the mystery. Sabatier, with another curse, threw himself on a couch placed in the quietest corner of the turret chamber.

“Leave me, messieurs, leave me!” he groaned. “My brain is exhausted with this continued effort to solve, to explain, to understand. I must sleep for an hour or two before I dine. Perhaps in my dreams I may hit on a solution—such things have happened before. Once, after three days and nights of fruitless labour, I fell into a deep sleep, and, awaking,

found that I had arisen from my couch and written out successfully the correct answer and working of the mathematical problem which had baffled me. Go, then, messieurs, for the present, and let me rest. Come to me again before midnight—say, at eleven.”

Sir John Bedford and M. Bremond, with no further word, left the room, and, descending the winding stair, let themselves out into the garden once more. They turned in the direction of the lawn, and for a time there was silence between them.

“You know of no other man than Sabatier?” said Sir John at last.

“There is no other man,” answered M. Bremond, with decision. “Had there been I should have procured him.”

“Of course there’s the man himself,” said Sir John.

“The man himself,” said M. Bremond, drily, “is, I fancy, somewhat capable of seeing that the full fruits of his labours are secured to himself.”

“And that’s precisely why Sabatier must be quick and forestall him,” said Sir John. “For it couldn’t be proved that the same idea hadn’t simultaneously occurred to both. And Saba-

tier's world-wide reputation as engineer and chemist form a most valuable asset."

"Precisely," said M. Bremond. Then, after a pause, he remarked: "It will be a wise thing to cultivate this young man."

"Oh yes, yes," agreed Sir John.

"He is particularly susceptible to feminine charm and influence," said the Abbé.

"Ah! it's a common affliction of genius," answered Sir John cynically.

"Miss Delomosne is a very charming and fascinating young woman," said his companion.

"Samson, you may remember, gave his secret away to Delilah."

Sir John turned and gave M. Bremond an understanding look. "Just so," he said. "That's worth considering. Well—we'll see Sabatier again to-night."

They entered the house, and each went off in the direction of his own rooms. But half-way up the great staircase a sudden idea struck Sir John Bedford, and he turned back, and, crossing the hall, knocked at a door in its further corner. Without waiting for any response to his knock he opened the door, and entered a small apartment furnished as a boudoir, at a desk in which sat Miss Delomosne, writing a letter.

Miss Delomosne looked up, and a close observer would have noticed that the hand which held the pen trembled a little, and that the expression of her face changed as she saw who her visitor was. The changed expression was one of dislike, mingled with undoubted fear ; it was the expression of a child accustomed to be bullied, of a dog that expects a blow. As for Sir John, he showed no comprehension of it.

"Look here, Lilian," he said, with easy familiarity, after he had closed the door and dropped, uninvited, into an easy-chair close to the desk at which she was writing ; "there's something you can be useful in—a simple matter for one of your talents."

"If it is anything like the last thing I was made useful in," she said, bitterly, "I should beg to be excused."

"Nonsense !" he said. "Talents are meant to be used."

"Yes, but not abused !" she answered, with emphasis.

"None of that !" he said, testily. "You can't afford to disoblige me, you know. Now listen—you've seen this young inventor, Workman?"

"Yes."

"And heard his account of the loss of his papers about his airship?"

"Yes."

Sir John coolly lit a cigarette. "The papers are in this house," he said.

Miss Delomosne turned from staring out of the window and stared at him. "In—this—house!" she exclaimed. "Who brought them here?"

"Bremond brought them here," he replied. "It's a deal between him, myself, and another man."

"Not Sir Herbert?" she asked, with some anxiety.

"Bah! No—old ass!" he answered. "All that's necessary for you to know is that Bremond and I found out some time ago that this boy had a secret of the most immense importance and value, and have engineered the obtaining of it."

"I wish I hadn't known that, even," she said.

"Oh, you won't tell," he said. "You daren't."

"Then—why tell me?" she asked.

"Because you're necessary to my plans," he answered, coldly. "This is what you've got to



do. I must keep this boy in good touch with this ménage both here and in London—it will be your part to encourage him, fascinate him, lead him on. There's no woman can do it better," he concluded, with a short, harsh laugh. "So do it—and do it well. I shall watch you."

For a moment she looked at him with a dumb indignation. "Are you always going to persecute me like this?" she whispered at last.

Sir John rose and made for the door. "No sentiment," he said. "You've got your lesson—now do it. I've the whip hand, Lilian."

Then he went away, and left her standing there with clenched fists and staring eyes.

## CHAPTER X

Laurence Workman was by nature and instinct one of those people who settle down at once into whatever fresh environment or condition of life they find themselves, and by the time he had spent twenty-four hours under Sir Herbert Armadale's hospitable roof he felt nearly as much at home as if he had been under his father's. To be sure, everybody there was exceptionally attentive to him—his host, whose usual expression was one of something approaching to weariness or boredom, bestirred himself to be particularly gracious to the young engineer ; his fellow-guests, M. Bremond and Sir John Bedford, were men of wide experience of the world and great powers of conversation, and were always ready to talk to him ; as for Miss Delomosne, exercising the position of chatelaine for her bachelor uncle, she did everything that was possible to make him feel that he was no merely conventional guest, but one whom they delighted to entertain.

Like all geniuses—poets, artists, musicians—Laurence was particularly susceptible to female influence. It was not that he was weak, vacillating, or too easily impressed; it was simply that he was born with that temperament which constrains men of eager and ardent feeling to be more than ordinarily susceptible to feminine beauty and charm of manner. He had been very much impressed by Miss Delomosne's personality when he met her on the boat between Ostend and Dover; now that he was actually under the same roof with her, seeing her all day long, being thrown constantly into her society, often left alone with her, he was more impressed than ever. He soon found out that she was very clever, that she had wit, humour, observation, and a shrewdness of vision somewhat uncommon in women; he also discovered—a dangerous thing for him in his present position, had he only been aware of it—that she was a remarkably good and sympathetic listener, and had the faculty of encouraging confidences. Laurence soon began talking to her as he might have talked to his mother or sister, pouring out his hopes and ambitions—of fears or doubts his youthful cocksureness as yet seemed to know nothing.

Sir John Bedford's cold, observant, keen eyes noticed these things, and he was glad. For as the days went on the man working in the turret-chamber, whose presence in the house was only known to M. Bremond, to Sir John Bedford, and to a confidential servant who was really in the latter's employ and knew a good many things of a curious nature, came no nearer to a solution of Laurence Workman's secret. He grew ill-tempered; he could not sleep; he often refused M. Bremond and Sir John admittance to his room; when they were there he gave them short, surly answers.

"It seems to me that Sabatier is baffled," said M. Bremond, after they had paid one of these visits.

"Then the man himself is our only hope," responded Sir John, curtly.

"That," said M. Bremond, "is what I have felt all along."

"Well, I've got one influence at work on him now," said Sir John, "and it seems to me to be going very well."

"You mean the girl?"

"Exactly—the girl. He is very impressionable."

M. Bremond took a pinch of snuff from his

elegant box. "In the intoxication of Love and Ambition—gratified or about to be gratified," he said, "an impulsive young man might become very amenable. How would it be to make this particular young man an offer that would arouse both vanity and ambition in him?"

"It strikes me he's got sufficient stock of ambition to fit out a complete army and navy," said Sir John. "No, I sounded him cautiously last night as to going into partnership with some big man or firm on his idea, but I found that he thinks otherwise. He wants everything for himself—all the money and all the kudos. I've a pretty big suspicion that his notion is to sell the secret to the British Government—he talks rather vaguely, but I believe he wants five millions for it. And with that five millions, or whatever it is, he wants to set up an engineering plant of his own in this country. He's got big ideas."

"All the more reason why he should be kept within our circle," said M. Bremond. "What about Armadale?"

"Well, of course," answered Sir John, "Armadale is completely under my thumb, as he has been for years. I have told him that it is absolutely necessary that this young fellow,

for purposes of vital importance to the firm, should be taken into our employ, no matter what it costs. And equally, of course, as Armadale leaves everything to me nowadays, he will agree with whatever I propose."

"And that is——?" asked M. Bremond.

"I shall make Workman an offer which no man in his senses would refuse," replied Sir John. "And when he accepts it I shall see that he is so much engaged for a time that he will have no opportunity of doing anything practical with his own affair. And meanwhile—we may forestall him."

"Through Sabatier?"

"Sabatier is certainly not baffled yet," said Sir John. "But Sabatier is not the only string to our bow. An impulsive young man, very much in love, will sometimes divulge even the most important business secret to his sweetheart."

M. Bremond nodded. "Or a young husband to his wife," he said, quietly.

"Just so," said Sir John. "It might come to that in this case."

"But," said M. Bremond, thoughtfully, "if in this case she became his wife would she divulge the secret?"

Sir John laughed, and the laugh was not



pleasant to hear. "You may leave that to me!" he said, with assurance.

M. Bremond once more took snuff. "I understand," he said. "You are very far-seeing, my friend."

"In these days," replied Sir John, "one doesn't go far unless one is."

Meanwhile the subject of this conversation was disporting himself pretty much after the fashion of a careless, irresponsible butterfly. He was daily more and more in Lilian Delomosne's society. Hurstdene Manor was a sort of Liberty Hall; everybody beneath its ancient roofs and gables did pretty much what he or she pleased. Sir Herbert's great idea of getting through a day was to lounge about his park, grounds, and garden, just as he liked, to trifle with his famous collection of coins, to have an idle chat with one or other of his visitors, and to have a quiet rubber of whist after dinner. He went up to town about twice a week, but never stayed at the offices more than an hour or two. Sir John Bedford went every day, sometimes taking M. Bremond with him. When the latter remained at Hurstdene Manor he spent most of his time in the library or in the rose-garden.

Thus the two younger people were constantly thrown into each other's society from morning till evening. Miss Delomosne was particularly fond of outdoor life; she took Laurence long walks through the wide-spreading, well-wooded park, famous for its old oaks and beeches; she drove him out in her smart dog-cart through some of the prettiest parts of Kent; she taught him to play golf on Sir Herbert's private links. And Laurence accepted the pleasant things which the gods gave him, and forgot everything but the moment. The days went on; he spoke of departing, and was pressed to stay longer; it required little to make him remain. After all, he said to himself, he was entitled to a holiday. The work might wait a little.

And in the secret turret-chamber Sabatier was hard at work—and hopeful. A gleam of illumination had come to him, and he became cheery of temper. "Courage, messieurs!" he would say to Sir John and M. Bremond when they paid their visits to him. "Sabatier sees a prospect—Sabatier knows not the meaning of defeat. *Nous verrons, messieurs, mes amis.*"

One day, some ten days after Laurence's arrival at Hurstdene Manor, Miss Delomosne

proposed an excursion by motor for herself and him. They would go by one roundabout way to Canterbury; they would lunch there; they would return by another, in time for dinner. Laurence hailed the prospect with delight, and suggested that M. Bremond should accompany them, as he knew so much about the Cathedral city and its beauties. But M. Bremond deeply regretted that he should not be able to give himself that great pleasure; he had a mass of neglected correspondence to attend to which he must clear off that morning. So Laurence and Miss Delomosne set out alone—she in the most bewitching of motor-hats and veils, and looking particularly handsome and vivacious.

It was long before lunch-time when they reached Canterbury, and after putting up the motor they proceeded to stroll about the city. Each that morning was in very good spirits, and Laurence, after his wont, was particularly attentive to his fascinating companion, whose beauty attracted a good deal of attention as they went about. Entirely absorbed in his conversation with her he never saw Charity Wraye who, turning a corner suddenly, came full upon them.

Charity, much against her will, had thought

a good deal of Laurence since his departure from the Three Travellers. She found herself seeing his handsome face, hearing his pleasant voice, at times when she ought to have been fully occupied in other directions, and she was angry with herself for the knowledge. After all, she had said to herself, he was very young, and his somewhat ardent language to herself was the result of almost boyish impulse. And yet there had been something in his manner which had given her an idea that he was not indifferent to her—certainly he had shown a great deal of pleasure in her society, and had seemed most anxious to see her in London. Perhaps—but when she had arrived at that stage she said very decisively that she would not, must not, allow her mind to dwell on such things any more. But Charity forgot that it was not so easy to control thoughts and feelings as some people would have us to believe, and it chanced that when she encountered Laurence and Miss Delomosne she was thinking of him. She was remembering how he and she had walked down that very street together; how he had talked about Destiny having brought him there, and of the confusion which filled him and reduced him to silence when he walked into the Three Travellers

and saw her for the first time. Essentially a woman, Charity had not heard all that without experiencing certain emotions—some reflex of them was upon her at the moment she met Laurence and his companion. Charity flashed one swift glance at Lilian Delomosne, and with a woman's unerring instinct recognised her beauty, her grace, her breeding. She lowered her head after that one quick look and hurried past, not wishing Laurence to see her; and, finishing the round of visits she was engaged on, went quickly home, very angry with herself because the mere sight of him had set her heart beating furiously. She had not fully regained her composure when she suddenly saw Laurence striding with light step and swinging cane across the cobble-paved yard in front of the inn. There was a boy in charge of the yard. Charity turned and fled to her own room. She was determined not to see Laurence.

Laurence, after Charity had passed him, had walked back with Miss Delomosne to the hotel where they had ordered lunch; and there, finding that they had three-quarters of an hour to spare, he had suddenly been struck by what seemed to his ingenuous mind a remarkably brilliant notion.

"When I stayed in Canterbury," he said, "I met a wonderfully nice and good girl, whose uncle is the landlord of the Three Travellers, where my papers were stolen."

Miss Delomosne's fine eyes entreated further information.

"Yes," continued Laurence; "and, oddly enough, she herself is secretary to Sir Herbert Armadale's secretary in London."

Miss Delomosne pricked her ears. "To Mr. Whitworth?" she said.

"She didn't tell me his name," replied Laurence. "She and her uncle were very kind to me. I was wondering—if she is still here—if she would come to lunch."

For a moment Miss Delomosne was not quite certain whether she would burst into laughter or not. Here was this extremely odd young man, who was just about to have lunch with her in a private room, talking of bringing in another young woman to join the feast! She smiled; but Laurence was staring out of the window.

"Why don't you go and ask her?" said Miss Delomosne.

"Why," said Laurence, with alacrity, "if you don't mind being left for a few minutes I think



I will. It would be a polite thing to do, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, very considerate, I'm sure!" replied Miss Delomosne. "She will no doubt appreciate the attention."

"Oh, she's a wonderfully sweet girl," said Laurence, picking up his hat. "I mean to see a great deal of her in London. Well, I'll go round—it isn't very far."

He hurried away in his usual breezy, cheerful fashion. Left alone, Miss Delomosne for a moment bit her finely-curved upper lip; then she laughed in somewhat strange fashion; lastly, she rose, and examining herself in the glass made one or two slight touches to her toilette, after which she sat down and waited for Laurence's return with his Canterbury belle.

But Laurence, after an absence of ten minutes, came back alone, looking somewhat surprised and dejected.

"Are we not to have the honour of the lady's company?" asked Miss Delomosne.

He shook his head. "No-o," he replied. "It's strange—she doesn't look the sort of girl who would be subject to them—but she's got a sick headache."

"All women are subject to sick headaches now and then," said Miss Delomosne.

"She was too unwell even to see me," continued Laurence.

"She must have been bad," remarked Miss Delomosne.

"Yes; I'm sorry," said Laurence. "I'm sure you'd like to have known her."

"This is a small world," said Miss Delomosne.

"We may meet yet."

Then the waiter came in with the first stages of lunch.

## CHAPTER XI

Five o'clock that afternoon found Miss Delomosne and her escort—or charge, as he might more fittingly be called—taking tea in a quaint old roadside inn, half-smothered in roses and climbing plants. Although it was within ten miles of Hurstdene Manor, and a somewhat unpretentious place which could give callers little more than tea, bread-and-butter, and home-made jam, Laurence had pleaded hard to call a halt there: it would bring the day to a piquant conclusion, he said, to drink tea under the porch of a roadside inn. And Miss Delomosne humoured him, as an indulgent governess might humour the child whom she is taking out for a birthday treat.

“It has been a delightful day,” said Laurence, as they sat there sipping tea out of old-fashioned china cups. “Quite a feast of a day.”

“In spite of the fact that you could not induce your lady of the Three Travellers to honour us with her presence at lunch?” asked his companion.

"Of course I was sorry for that," said Laurence, innocently. "I am sure you would have liked her."

"Why should I have liked her?"

"Because——"

"Because you liked her, I suppose?"

"Oh, I liked her very, very much," he said, with open candour.

"And I suppose you intend to visit her in London?" said Miss Delomosne.

"I promised that I would," he replied.

"Did she ask you to do so?"

"Oh no, no! I asked permission."

Miss Delomosne looked at him somewhat peculiarly. "I thought you said she was a clerk—a typist—secretary or something," she said.

"Secretary to Sir Herbert's secretary," he answered.

"And her uncle is the landlord of an inn?" she continued.

"Yes—a really original sort of character," he said.

"But you don't want to associate with people of that sort," she said, with a slight curl of her fine lips. "You—with your ambition!"

Laurence felt himself blushing—and did not

know why. There was something in his companion's voice which both chilled and warmed him. It had the same effect on him mentally as a leap into an ice-cold stream and out again would have had on him physically.

"They are very good, simple, honest people," he said.

"And I daresay the people of this inn are good, simple, honest people," she said, "but that doesn't imply that you need make friends of them. You know you are very ambitious, that you have great ideas in your mind, a high ideal before you——"

"Yes, yes!" he exclaimed, eagerly.

"Then you must make your friends amongst the people who can help you," she said. "You must find them amongst the people of influence, of wealth, of standing. Those are the people who will best help you in your work."

Laurence was gazing dreamily across the garden of the inn, gay with a profusion of homely summer flowers.

"My work!" he said, as if those were the only two words he had caught. "Yes, I must get to my work. I am keeping away from it too long. I shall bring my very delightful visit to an end to-morrow, and go to London."

Miss Delomosne helped herself to more tea, and stirred the cream into it slowly. "And what are you going to do when you get there?" she asked.

"Go on again with my invention until it is a *ne plus ultra* of perfection," he replied promptly.

"Then it is not perfect?" she said.

"It is perfect for all practical purposes," he replied, "but it can be improved."

"And the improvements would take some time and money?" she suggested.

"I have plenty of time, and I am not without money," he answered.

Miss Delomosne sipped her tea thoughtfully. "And supposing the man who has stolen your papers profits so much from what he learns there that he will be able to penetrate your secret and forestall you?" she said.

Laurence fingered the turned-up ends of his moustache. He frowned a little. "To tell you the truth," he said, after a brief pause, "I feel safer about that as every day succeeds another. I do not think that this man ever will make out the secret, whoever he may be. From my papers he can learn the exact construction of my invention and a great many other things of



use to him, but he cannot—at least, I think not—get out of them the secret which is the very life-breath, the soul of the whole thing. I do not think it possible—that is why I view the theft with something like equanimity, much as I resent it.”

“But there are very, very clever men in the world,” said Miss Delomosne. “Suppose this man is as big a genius as you are, that he hits on the secret and forestalls you, say, with the British Government?”

She threw out this suggestion with a purpose, though she spoke with seeming carelessness, and she saw at once that she had hit a mark. Laurence started, and the frown came back to his straight brows.

“That would be a bad business,” he said. “For——”

“Yes?” she said, encouragingly, seeing that he was puzzled by some thought, and that not a pleasant one.

“In that case,” he said, “it would be an impossibility to prove that the original secret was mine. It would only be my word against the word of—the thief. And he would have been first in the field.”

He looked so much disturbed and troubled

in saying this that Miss Delomosne felt a disposition to dare all, to tell him the truth, and to face the consequences. But the thought of Sir John Bedford's cold face and hard eyes, the remembrance of his implacable spirit, and of his last words to her, sent a shiver of fright through her and drove out any other feeling than that of the instinct of self-preservation.

"Of course there is that danger," she said. "And that makes me think that you would be well advised to accept the offer which Sir John Bedford made you yesterday on behalf of the firm."

For on the previous day Sir John, with Sir Herbert Armadale's full approval, and in the latter's presence, had made Laurence an offer which no one could regard as other than magnificent. It was certainly one which most young men of Laurence's age and profession would have received with a surprise as great as their gratification. And Laurence had asked for time to consider it.

He looked at Miss Delomosne narrowly when she gave him this advice. Her eyes were turned away from him, and she was engaged in trying to balance a tea-spoon on the rim of a cup.

"Why?" he asked.

"Why? Because it would give you such an assured position," she answered.

"But I want to finish my invention," he said.

"You would have spare time," she said.

"But I wanted to build a workshop in which to put my invention together," he urged.

"I should think that Armadales are the very people to give you accommodation for that," she said.

"Yes, I suppose there is that much to be considered," he agreed.

He sat thinking in silence for some time; Miss Delomosne continued to trifle with the tea-spoon.

"Why," he said at last—"why are you so personally anxious that I should accept this offer?"

She turned and looked at him calmly, but with an expression in her eyes which set his pulses beating.

"Because I feel sure it is for your advancement—and good," she answered.

"Do they—matter to you?" he asked.

Miss Delomosne dropped the long-fringed lids over her eyes, and, looking down, began to finger the magnificent rings on her slender fingers.

"I am much interested in you," she said. "I should like you to have a career. One wishes one's best for one's friends."

"Am I to be—a friend, then?" said Laurence. "Your friend?"

"I should like you to be," she murmured. "I—I haven't many."

Laurence looked at her for some time in silence. Then he suddenly stood up and involuntarily squared his shoulders, stretched his arms, and set his teeth.

"Come along," he said. "Let's go. I'll accept that offer to-night. And to-morrow I'll get to work."

Then he went off towards the motor, and Miss Delomosne followed him, not quite sure of her own feelings. Still—she had won.

Laurence was, for him, unusually silent during the remainder of the return to Hurst-dene Manor. Miss Delomosne made no attempt to draw him out of his evident preoccupation; she herself had plenty to think about.

That evening, half an hour before dinner, Sir John Bedford found her alone in the drawing-room.

"Come into the conservatory," he said; "I want to speak to you."

She obeyed his command with mechanical acquiescence, knowing that it was useless to refuse. He led the way to a quiet part of the conservatory from which, while they could see anyone who approached them, it was impossible for any third person to overhear their conversation. There, after lighting a cigarette, he turned and looked at her narrowly.

"I hope that you made good use of your opportunities to-day?" he said. "One can do a great deal in a whole day."

"I think you may rest satisfied," she replied coldly.

"Ah! then you have persuaded him?" he said.

"To accept your offer?" she said. "Yes."

"Any conditions? I may as well know in anticipation of my next talk to him," he said.

"I think he will insist on having a workshop given up to him," she said. "He wants to make his machine, or whatever it is."

Sir John seemed to consider matters. "Oh, well," he said, "I daresay we can humour him in that."

"I should advise you to," she said. "He's pertinacious enough."

"Anything else?" he remarked, passing her last remark over.

"Nothing. Except—I don't know how important it may be, or if it is at all important—he now believes that whoever stole his documents will not be able to make any use of them," she said.

Sir John looked at her inquiringly.

"He thinks," she continued, "that it's impossible for anybody to find out his secret. That's what makes him seem indifferent to his loss."

"Oh!" he said. "I see. Well—nous verrons."

He threw away the end of his cigarette, lighted another, and strolled off without another word.

"Stop!" she said.

Sir John looked back, and at first showed no sign of retracing the two or three steps he had taken. Something in her face made him do so.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"Have I done all there is for me to do in this?" she asked. "I—I don't want to do more."

Sir John laughed a little, and looked at her. She had pulled a rare flower from a plant close



by, and was plucking it to pieces, petal by petal, with nervous fingers.

"What's the use of destroying things like that?" he said. "Is there anything more you can do? Ah, I've no doubt there is. Of course I shall tell you—when there is."

He turned off again, and again she stopped him.

"Then what am I to have for my share?" she asked.

"That," he answered, still watching her with cold eyes—"that you can leave to me."

"There's one thing you can repay me with——" she burst out passionately. But a slight motion of his uplifted hand, a look in his eyes, stopped her.

"No!" he said. "No! At any rate, not yet. At my time—at my time, perhaps. Not until then."

Miss Delomosne looked at him for a full moment without speaking. Then she crushed what remained of the flower into a shapeless mass and threw it at her feet, and set one foot on it.

"I wish I could crush you out of existence like that!" she exclaimed. "I would!"

"I daresay you would, but you can't," he

said, quietly. "Whatever crushing there is to be done in this game I will do. Don't treat me to any more tantrums."

"Why do you torture me like this?" she said, between her teeth.

"Why did you once torture me?" he asked.

She let her hands drop inert at her sides, and Sir John, without another word, turned and went away. At the door of the conservatory he met Laurence, and, taking him by the arm, he led him into the house.

That night M. Bremond was late for dinner. He came bustling in as the fish was served, making many apologies.

"We thought you had not returned from town, so we did not wait," said Miss Delomosne.

M. Bremond bowed, and passed a slip of paper over to Sir John. "A memorandum for you," he said, as Sir John glanced at it. "Lest I forget."

And Sir John read—and made no sign—  
"*Sabatier has discovered the secret!*"

## CHAPTER XII

While the victim of himself and his fellow-conspirators was enjoying his dinner at Sir Herbert Armadale's hospitable board, M. Paul Sabatier sat in his lonely turret-chamber gloating over his triumph. The remains of a lordly repast, served to him by Sir John Bedford's confidential servant, lay spread in confusion on the side-table, but the contents of the big table under the window, disorderly enough until that evening, were now arranged in apple-pie order, as if some very precise and methodical person had been tidying up. The papers which had been strewn here and there on the table, and chairs, and floor, were now gathered up, and had, in fact, disappeared; all that remained to be seen was a neat pile of documents resting upon a blotting pad, and held down by a heavy brass paper-weight—pens, ink, mathematical instruments, were all in place. M. Sabatier, in short, had completed his task.

And, having completed it, M. Sabatier was

taking his ease. He sat in a deep easy-chair, lolling as only a man can loll who has gone through the heat and burden of a long-continued battle. A huge pipe, from which he poured forth volcanoes of smoke, reeking of strong, pungent tobacco, was between his bearded lips; a bottle of champagne, half its contents gone, stood, with an attendant glass, on a little stand at his side. From time to time M. Sabatier threw back his leonine head, shook his mighty locks, and laughed noiselessly.

“It is thou that art the brave boy, Paul, my son!” he said, talking to himself. “It is thou that wert born to success, my persevering one! See thou, then, Paul—another less noble, less unconquerable, would have experienced the failure of the heart, of the will, of the brain, when brought face to face with this task, so great, so stupendous. Didst thou faint, my Paul? Sacrebleu! Not thou! Obstacles for such as thou art are but the spurs that prick one on to the topmost heights of glory. Thou art of the immortals, Paul, my brave one!”

Thus indulging in wine, tobacco, and in purple praisings of his own grandeur M. Sabatier passed the evening very comfortably until sunset passed away, and the soft dusk curtained

his window. He was thinking about lighting his lamp, when a gentle tapping at his door warned him that he was visited. M. Sabatier rose slowly from the depth of his easy-chair, emptied the contents of his glass, and stretched his great arms.

“Ah, messieurs, the arch-plotters!” he murmured, with a wink at the darkening window. “They come for more news. Name of a dog! I never know which is the bigger scoundrel of the two. But it would take many clever scoundrels to outwit thee, Paul, my son.”

With this reassuring remark to his own inner consciousness, M. Sabatier leisurely crossed the room, opened the heavy door, and revealed M. Bremond and Sir John Bedford, at sight of whom he immediately manifested the most profound joy, mingled with emotion.

“Ah, my friends!” he said, extending a hand to each. “You come, you who have been patient with me, who have condoled with me, who have wept with me in my hours of defeat, to rejoice with me, to laugh with me, in my moment of triumph! Suffer that I embrace you. Yes, my friends,” he continued, the embracing over—a process to which Sir John submitted with a grim endurance which would

have done credit to a marble statue—"yes, I have triumphed. I have solved the problem—I, Paul!"

"You're quite sure you're not making any mistake?" said Sir John, in his coldest, most matter-of-fact manner.

"Mistake? I, Sabatier? I never make mistakes," said the scientist, drawing his strange figure to its full height. "Behold!" and he swept his huge right hand in the direction of the tidy table. "It is done."

"You certainly do look as if you had been clearing up, so far as I can see," said Sir John, half sneeringly. "Haven't you got a light, Sabatier?"

"Humour him," whispered M. Bremond, as Sabatier turned aside to light a lamp. "He has a deuce of a temper. I congratulate you heartily, monsieur," he said, raising his voice. "But I expected it of you. I knew that your talents would be able to ensure success."

"I have always said," remarked Sir John, "that M. Sabatier was the first man in the world to apply the knowledge of chemistry to that of engineering. And he has neither equal nor yet approachable second."



"Let us drink M. Sabatier's health," suggested M. Bremond.

Mollified at these tributes to his genius and greatness the scientist, who had by this time drawn a heavy blind across the window and set the lamp on the table, produced a large bottle of champagne and a box of cigars. His two visitors solemnly drank to him; he received their reiterated compliments as Napoleon may have received the plaudits of his generals.

"And what is the secret, Sabatier?" asked Sir John, taking a seat and lighting a cigar.

The scientist stretched out his great arms and shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, monsieur," he said; "you are not, pardon me, a chemist. Neither is the good M. Bremond. At least, you do not understand the application of chemistry to motive power, except in an elementary way. I could not, therefore, explain to you what I could to one who knows as much as I do. Suffice it to say, the secret lies in the application of a certain natural chemical force to a specially-designed engine."

"And that done?" asked M. Bremond.

Sabatier swept the air with a curve of his long arms. "One could cross the Atlantic in

thirty hours in one unbroken flight!" he said.

Sir John and M. Bremond exchanged glances. Each drank more wine, lifting their glasses with hands that trembled a little with eagerness.

"And you can superintend the putting of this machine together and the application of this force to its motive power?" asked Sir John.

Sabatier, who had refilled his huge pipe, blew a mighty cloud of smoke about his massive head. "I can!" he said.

"Supposing you set to work at once, how soon could you complete it?"

Sabatier considered matters. "In one month from the day I start—granted every facility," he answered.

Sir John looked at M. Bremond. "Now, let us consider what is best to be done," he said. "Sabatier, you are in with us in this——"

"To the extent of one-third," interrupted Sabatier.

"Precisely. You are to have one-third. Therefore, I explain the position to you. The young man, Workman——"

"A great genius—a great genius!" muttered Sabatier.

"Of whose secret we are now possessed,"

said Sir John, sardonically. "Workman, I say, has this evening signed a contract to enter into the employment of Armadales' London branch at a very handsome salary. His only stipulation is that we give him a small workshop for his own private use, in which he can work in his own time. There he intends to complete and perfect his invention. You understand?"

Sabatier nodded gravely. "I understand, my friend, that it will be your part to take care that Mr. Workman does not complete his task within a month," he said, meaningly.

Sir John nodded. "It will be my particular care to see that it is never finished at all!" he answered, with sinister meaning. "Or, if by chance it is, that it never leaves the work-shop."

"Good!" said Sabatier, calmly. "It is best to be clear. We will consider that the young man is disposed of. So, then——"

"So, then," continued Sir John, "the great question for us to solve is—where will you work? There are objections to my giving you facilities here in England."

"In addition to which," said M. Bremond, "we must remember our intention with regard to the destiny of our work."

Sabatier puffed out more smoke, and refilled

his visitors' glasses. "My friends," he said, "leave the matter to me. I possess a small château a few miles out of Rouen, on the road to Paris—an ideally quiet spot, messieurs, where I am as free from interruption and disturbance as if I were in the midst of the Arctic regions. I have there a workshop sufficiently large for what is wanted. I have also a faithful mechanic, with whose aid I can do all that is necessary. It is, therefore, I, Sabatier, who will take the actual manufacture in charge."

The two other conspirators looked at each other. Sabatier continued to smoke calmly.

"I had intended to offer you the use of my own workshops," said M. Bremond at last. "But——"

"I think Sabatier's proposal is best," interrupted Sir John. "As we are both at about equal distances from his château we can visit him there from time to time during the progress of the work."

"I shall have the honour of entertaining you often, I trust, messieurs," said Sabatier, with a polite bow.

"Very well, then," said Sir John, after a brief pause. "Then there is nothing else that we need discuss just now, I think?"

M. Bremond, who had taken little part in the discussion, coughed discreetly. "There is the question of my entering upon the preliminary negotiations," he said.

"There is certainly that," said Sir John.

"I can embark upon that in a tentative fashion, immediately," continued M. Bremond. "Governments are slow to move, and we should lose no time."

Sabatier stroked his great beard. "My friends," he said, "if you take my advice, we shall not make any advances, undertake any negotiations, until the work is complete. One moment of practical proof is worth a whole month of negotiations about what to those negotiated with will seem but a wild and extravagant theory. Let me finish—then let those we desire to dispose of our work to, send a trusted emissary to see it; let me take that emissary for a swift flight of a thousand miles—eh, messieurs?"

Both M. Bremond and Sir John felt that in Sabatier there was a mightier mind than their own. The Belgian nodded an acquiescence; the Englishman stroked his square chin.

"We can discuss that at our next meeting," he said. "The thing now is for Sabatier to go ahead."

"And for me to leave here at once," said Sabatier, rising and knocking the ashes out of his pipe. He walked across to a corner of the chamber, picked up a stout, much-worn leathern valise, threw into it carelessly a few odds and ends which lay about, bestowed in an inner pocket the papers from the table, and closing the lock with a snap hung it round his shoulders.

"I am ready," he said.

"My motor will be at the wicket-gate in the shrubbery in fifteen minutes," said Sir John. "I will go round for it at once."

Sabatier turned out the lamp; they all then groped their way down the winding stair, and, unlocking the door of the turret, let themselves out into the darkness of the gardens.

"I will walk across to the gate with our friend," whispered M. Bremond.

Sir John slipped off round a corner of the house; M. Bremond and Sabatier plunged into a thick shrubbery. A few minutes' walk brought them to a wicket-gate opening upon a high-road. There they paused.

"I suppose we may trust him?" said Sabatier in French.

M. Bremond shrugged his shoulders in the



darkness. "I will keep my eyes on him until the time is ripe, my friend," he answered.

"Good!" said Sabatier.

Then they said no more, but waited in silence, until around a curve of the road came the two great lights of a powerful motor-car, out of which, as it paused before them, Sir John stepped. In front, by the chauffeur, sat the confidential servant who had waited upon Sabatier in his solitude. This individual, when the passenger had settled himself and whispered his adieux, spoke three words in a low voice to the chauffeur:

"The Dover road."

So the three conspirators parted for the time being.

As for their intended victim, he was at that moment in his bedroom at Hurstdene Manor, making some preparations for his departure for London on the morrow. He was full of a great resolve—but when he went to bed and slept his rest was disturbed by dreams of Lilian Delomosne and Charity Wraye.

## CHAPTER XIII

As most people who have travelled and seen the great places of the world are well aware, there are few principal cities traversed by rivers in which the sides of those rivers present such a contrast to each other as the banks of the Thames do in London. From Chelsea onward, as far, at least, as the historic Tower, the eye sees little that is not striking on the north side of the great river which intersects the heart of the metropolis—Chelsea Hospital, the Tate Gallery, the Houses of Parliament, the long stretch of noble houses, magnificent hotels, which lie between Westminster and Waterloo Bridge, the great façade of Somerset House, the new buildings between Surrey Street and the Temple, the Temple itself, old and venerable as the modern erections east of it are new and of the latest styles, the glorious dome of St. Paul's towering high above Ludgate and Blackfriars, the spires and towers of the City, and lastly the ancient Tower itself, with its

Norman keep still menacing city and river alike. This long stretch of buildings, each more or less historic, or raised on some spot made historic by association, forms a great sweep of which all good Londoners are not a little proud, and at which folk who are not Londoners gaze with hearty admiration.

But the south side of the Thames has no such panorama of fine architecture, no such vista of poems in stone, to show. From Westminster to Greenwich the eye seeks in vain for aught that has in it the elements of beauty. The fine old church of St. Mary Overy, now called Southwark Cathedral, is hidden from view by huge, unlovely warehouses; nowhere, until one comes to Greenwich itself, is there anything to see but evidences of hard, grinding industry. Warehouses, wharves; wharves, warehouses—this sequence goes on in dreary monotony to the end. In the warehouses men toil without ceasing; at the wharves, and on the grim, black-hulled merchant ships which lie against them this ceaseless toil is also always going on. Great piles of wood and iron are stacked here and there; in front of the long range of warehouses and wharves all manner of craft carry huge loads of all manner of com-

modities when the river covers the unsightly mud-banks which run up to their edge. This is not the side of the Thames which represents laughter, and leisure, and pleasure, and the expenditure of money on dinners and theatres, and the joy of life; it is not even the side where hard-working men make a living by the gentler forms of bread-winning; it is the side where men gain their daily bread literally by the sweat of their brows and the strain of their muscles and sinews, the side where the most of life is hard work from morning till night, year in, year out, where there is little leisure, and where pleasure is a scarcity.

Behind this rampart of warehouse and wharf, long stretches of dreary river-wall and embankments of docks and basins, lies a land which the folk of the London of leisure and pleasure know not so much of as they do of places lying hundreds of miles away. It is a grey and dreary land, given up, like the buildings that shut it in from the river, to industry. Depôts for grain, yards for wood, iron, stone, breweries, foundries, cooperages—all manner of industrial beehives and ant-heaps are found here, stretching for miles within stone's-throw of the great river highway. Behind them, rising inland,

as if they would struggle to something less drab and dreary, are hundreds upon hundreds of little mean streets, of degrees of respectability which may be reckoned in dozens, if not in scores. Amongst these little streets, so pathetic in their prevalent monotony, are here and there equally little and mean squares or crescents, often with a few stunted and smoke-blackened trees or shrubs in their midst—oases in the surrounding desert of uniformity. And here and there, too, turning out of street or square, one comes across some huge building, towering high above everything which surrounds it, upon the very aspect of which is inscribed in characters only to be seen by the eye of imagination some legend or other that proclaims it to be that outcome of modern industrialism—a workshop in which hundreds or thousands of human beings work together as if they were component parts of one vast machine.

One such place as this, enclosed from the rows of small streets about it by a wall of brick some twenty feet in height, lay in the very heart of this district. There were no houses so near this wall that they could overlook it. All that could be seen from the nearest houses of what lay within it was the roofs of various sheds

and workshops, together with two huge chimney-stacks which rose at least a hundred and fifty feet above the surrounding neighbourhood. There was but one entrance to this jealously-guarded enclosure—a castle gateway-like sort of entrance on the side nearest to the river. This possessed two sets of double doorways, separated by a stout wall in the middle. Through one ran a set of rails which traversed one side of the street without, and led to a specially reserved quay on the riverside; the other was reserved for vehicular traffic. In the other gate there was inset a smaller one, in which was a shuttered grating, placed there so that the porter within could see who sought admittance before opening the big doors or the small one. No one who lived thereabouts ever thought of those doors as ever being anything but shut. Certainly they opened at times—one for the entrance or exit of waggons drawn by a steam-engine from or to the wharf, the other for the coming or going of horse or motor-drawn traffic. But even when they were open no passer-by could see anything of the yard and workshops within, for some fifteen yards beyond them rose another high wall which stopped all further view.

Although there was no seeing within this



four-square enclosure no one who passed by it could fail to know what went on inside it and its workshops. All day, and at times all night, the clank and clang of machinery went on within the walls, the sharp musical ring of metal striking against metal, the heavier thud and crash of great steam-hammers pounding steel or iron, re-echoed and reverberated against the boundary wall, which tossed the sound upward, to be carried by whatever passing wind there might be to the houses not only close by but at some distance. At night, from the furnaces, gleams of bright fire shot up into the sky. That this was a place where iron and steel were dealt with as easily as some men deal with wood or clay no passer-by could doubt. And above the great prison-like gateway, in solid letters of brass, plain in design and each a yard in height, were the words: "Armadales, Limited, Engineers."

Into this gateway, on the afternoon succeeding the departure of M. Sabatier from Hurstdene Manor, entered Sir John Bedford and Laurence Workman in the former's motor-car. That morning the weather, which had been consistently fine and bright since Laurence's arrival in England, had suddenly changed, and he had obtained his first experience of grey skies and

his first glimpse of London under dispiriting conditions. There had been a steady fall of light tantalising rain all the way from Hurstdene. Here, in this mean, toil-worn district, the rain and the prevalent greyness, combined with the evidences of drudgery which he saw on all sides, produced in Laurence's mind a feeling of depression. But he reflected that he could not always expect to make holiday in such pleasant quarters as those in which he had spent the past ten days, and that industrial neighbourhoods are seldom very good to look upon.

Once within the works Sir John Bedford gave him a cordial welcome to Armadales', and conducted him to a block of buildings in the centre of the yard, which Laurence discovered to be the offices. From there the various workshops branched away in every direction, and from a balcony surrounding the upper storey each could be overlooked. Laurence, walking round this balcony, expressed his approval of the arrangements of the yard.

"Yes, it's all modern and well contrived," said Sir John. "Well, now, Workman, it seems to me that the first thing to do is to find the place which will be suitable for your purposes. Now, in the south-east corner—over there—

we have a good workshop which is not in use and won't be in use for some months. Let's go over and look at it."

Leaving the offices, Sir John obtained some keys, and they crossed the yard to the shop he had pointed out. Once inside, Laurence saw that it was exactly the place he wanted. About sixty feet square and thirty high, its sole light came from its arched roof of glass. The large double-doors, which formed almost one end of it, were massive and strongly secured. At the end opposite the doors was a partition shutting off an office which could only be entered from the workshop itself, and, like it, was lighted from the roof.

"How does it strike you?" asked Sir John.

Laurence showed his delight. "It's just the place I want!" he answered, enthusiastically. "If I had designed it myself it couldn't have been better."

"Well, I thought it would do," said Sir John. "You see, as there are no windows nobody can look in. The only door in the place, like the double-doors at the end, has a special patent lock. There's a fine installation of electric light, and the office is a great convenience. Think it will suit you exactly, then?"

"Indeed it will, and I am much obliged to you," answered Laurence. "It is most kind to afford me such splendid facilities."

"Then, there are the keys," said Sir John, placing them in his hand. "That's the side-door, that's the double-door, that's the door of the office. Now let's go back to my room, and we'll have a glass of champagne to the luck of your enterprise."

Over the wine and cigars, which Sir John produced from a private cupboard, Laurence's employer and host went into further details. "Now, let's see, Workman," he said; "as your agreement with us doesn't come into force until the first of July, you've got exactly a fortnight in which to make arrangements of your own. I suppose you'll employ that in getting your materials together in your workshop?"

"Oh, of course," replied Laurence. "I shall waste no time."

"Can you do it in a fortnight?" asked Sir John.

Laurence made a thoughtful calculation. "Yes," he answered; "by working extra hard I can."

"Good," thought the other man; "by that time Sabatier will be well on his way to com-

pletion." "Well," he said aloud, "if there's anything you want that you can find in the works themselves—tools, machinery, material—don't scruple to ask for them. I'll give the head foreman orders to supply you with anything we have that will assist you."

Laurence again expressed his heartfelt thanks. He was beginning to think that Sir John Bedford was a genuine benefactor.

"By-the-by," said Sir John, "won't you want some help? A mechanic?"

"Yes—one," answered Laurence; "but he's already arranged for—a man named Herman Groot, who helped me in Germany. I shall telegraph to him at once, and he will start to-morrow."

"Herman Groot, eh?" said Sir John, as if he wished to fix the name in his memory. "Is he at all acquainted with your schemes?"

"Oh no, no!" replied Laurence, smiling. "Groot is merely a skilful mechanic, useful for helping in fitting things. No, he will serve me until the big, the important work comes——"

"And that?"

"That," said Laurence, smiling again—"that, of course, I shall do myself."

Sir John nodded. "I see," he said. "Well,

I think we've settled everything now. But there's another matter for yourself. You'll want to find rooms in London, and as you're a stranger I should suggest that you let my man, Saunders, who came up with us, help you. He knows everything, that fellow."

"You are very kind," replied Laurence, "but I'd already thought of that. I must be close to the works—within a few minutes' walk of them."

Sir John stared. "What, in this hole of a district!" he exclaimed. "You couldn't live here."

"It certainly doesn't seem a very nice residential district," said Laurence, ruefully, "but until my private work is finished I must remain in it. I will look round it—I daresay I shall find something suitable. I am really very modest in my requirements. If I can get two clean rooms I shall be satisfied."

"Well," said Sir John, "if you're really resolved on that I daresay I can help you. We've a cashier here who dwells somewhere about—he'll know. Send Mr. Johnson here," he called through a speaking-tube at his desk.

Mr. Johnson listened to Laurence's requirements with an air of mild surprise, and scratched



his chin with the end of his pen. "Well, sir," he said, "of course it's a working-class district—but there are places where a gentleman could find reasonable accommodation. There's Madeira Square, sir—that's quite a superior spot. And I happen to know, Sir John, that Mrs. Wickham there—her husband used to be in the works, Sir John, you'll remember, and she has a pension from us—has at this moment two very good rooms to let. She's a very respectable, clean woman, sir, and said to be a good cook."

"Then take Mr. Workman round there, Johnson," said Sir John, "and he can see for himself if the place suits him."

So Mr. Johnson conducted Laurence across a labyrinth of small streets to an equally small square, which had evidently seen much better days and was still making a valiant struggle to live up to a former reputation. Mrs. Wickham and her house and rooms were all that Mr. Johnson had represented them to be, and she was very glad to receive a gentleman who belonged to the great firm with which her deceased spouse had been connected. So, as Laurence's immediately necessary baggage was in Sir John Bedford's motor-car, he went back

and sent it on to Madeira Square in a cab, and a little later followed it himself and proceeded to settle down in his new and very unfamiliar quarters.

Writing out a telegram to Mr. Herman Groot that evening, bidding him set off for London next day, he asked his landlady the whereabouts of the nearest office, and went to despatch it himself. He had no suspicion that he was about to enter upon another phase of his adventures. But entering the post-office he came face to face with Charity Wraye.

## CHAPTER XIV

The remembrance of the meeting with Laurence at Canterbury, when he was too much engrossed with Miss Delomosne to see her, brought a sudden rising of colour to Charity's cheek. If she could have had her way she would have made a sudden escape. Something—she was unable to tell what—was making her shy of this impetuous young man whose usual policy of life, it seemed, was to carry things all before him with an irresistible rush which was not lightly to be stemmed or resisted. And in addition to that, being a woman, she could not help feeling the gladness which Laurence openly manifested at seeing her, nor steel her heart against the charm of manner with which he held out his hands—both hands—utterly regardless of the fact that such an action was somewhat un-English, and that there were several spectators.

“Well, how glad I am to see you!” he exclaimed, pressing the hand which Charity was obliged to give him between both his own

with something which the audience took to be very like affection. "How is your poor head?"

Charity stared at him with eyes full of perplexed surprise. For a moment she wondered if Laurence was a little bit cracked. To greet her in that enthusiastic fashion, and then to inquire after her poor head—it seemed, at any rate, strange.

"My head?" she said, wishing he would not stand so squarely and resolutely in front of her in the door of the post-office, and that he would release her hand. "I—don't understand, Mr. Workman."

"Not understand?" he answered, looking as surprised as she was. "Ah, of course, I see—ladies so soon forget these little ailments. When I called the other day, you know, you had such a bad headache that it was not possible to see me."

"Oh, of course," she said. "Yes, I had forgotten. But see, we are keeping people from coming in and getting out."

Laurence looked at the persons with whose convenience he was interfering pretty much as a mastiff might look at a company of toy terriers. "Let me just send off my telegram," he said, "and I will rejoin you."

"And without so much as 'By your leave!'" thought Charity. She watched him push his way to the counter, and felt that she would have to wait for his return. But not being minded to remain the cynosure of all eyes, nor to have Laurence, who never dreamt of modulating the tone of his voice, proclaim anything further in public, she went out into the street, where he presently joined her.

"And so you have returned to London?" he said, walking along at her side. "It reconciles me to London that you have."

"I began my work again this morning," she answered, ignoring his last words.

"At Armadales?" he said.

"Yes."

"Well, now, isn't it perhaps another stroke of destiny?" he went on, almost gleefully. "I, too, am going to work at Armadales—yes, they have given me a magnificent appointment, beyond my utmost dreams."

"I am very glad," murmured Charity, who really meant that she was very much astonished and not quite certain whether she was pleased or confused. "But I thought you were going to complete your invention?"

"So I am," he said. "You see, after I left

the Three Travellers I went to stay with Sir Herbert Armadale at Hurstdene Manor, and Sir John Bedford was there, who, as you know, manages everything. It was he—with the approval of the firm, of course—who made me this offer. And, what is more, Sir John has given me splendid facilities for making my machine; I am to have a spare workshop so excellently adapted to my purposes that it could not have been better if I had designed it myself.”

“I am very glad,” again said Charity.

She was really glad, because Laurence seemed quite delighted with his news; in her heart she was wondering what Sir John Bedford had in view. From some fairly considerable experience of that gentleman and his doings she was not greatly disposed to believe in his generosity or disinterestedness, and she began to speculate on his views in this direction.

“Is the firm going to have some financial interest in your invention?” she asked. “I suppose it is?”

“Oh no, no!” replied Laurence. “You see, I did not wish at first to give them my services until my own work was done. But they have a great contract in hand with which they believe



I shall be able to deal much to their advantage, so I have agreed to serve them for two years in return for a very handsome salary and the facilities I have told you of. It is an arrangement that suits us both."

"I hope it will turn out well," said Charity.

"Oh yes," exclaimed Laurence, cheerfully optimistic. "It is sure to do that. I shall begin work to-morrow; on the day after I expect a workman of my own from Germany, and he and I will quickly put things together."

"And the stolen papers?" asked Charity.

Laurence spread out his hands and shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, of course, I have never heard a word of them," he answered; "and I never shall. But it does not matter, for I am daily more convinced that the thief will never find out my secret from them. Poor man! He will be like a mechanic who builds a beautiful machine and then finds that he cannot for the life of him start it."

"That will serve him right," said Charity. She paused at the corner of a street at which they had arrived, and held out her hand. "I must say good evening, Mr. Workman," she continued. "I am late from the office, and my brother will be wondering where I am."

"Ah, yes, your brother!" he said. "Yes, I remember very well. You promised that I might call to see him—may I not come, then, now?"

Charity hesitated. True, she had said he might come to see her and her brother, but——

"That would be taking you out of your way to-night," she said. "This is a long way from your part of London."

Laurence looked at her in surprise. "My part of London!" he exclaimed. "This is all the part of London I know, so far. I only arrived in Sir John Bedford's motor-car this afternoon. And I shan't have time to see more of it just yet."

"But you're not going to live—here?" she said, in surprise.

"Yes, I am, and I have already got rooms in Madeira Square," he replied. "I must be close to the works. Don't you live here?"

"I? Oh yes," she said. "But that's different. We are used to it, Dickie and I. Besides, we are poor people, and can't afford to live elsewhere."

"I want to see your brother," said Laurence. "Mayn't I walk home with you? Perhaps you will ask me to have a cup of tea?"

Charity smiled. "Yes, I can do that," she said, "and give you some things from the country, too, which you couldn't get about here. Mr. Waple made me bring a whole hamper full of all sorts of fine things."

"Ah, the excellent Waple!" said Laurence. "He is the soul of hospitality; it makes one hungry to look at him."

Charity laughed, and led the way along the street. "Don't expect anything grand in the way of buildings," she said. "Dickie and I reside in a sort of barrack-like place of workmen's dwellings. Fortunately, it is modern, and has all the latest improvements."

She presently came to a great four-square building of red and yellow brick which towered high above the dull, drab-hued street beneath it. Entrance to this was gained by a sort of tunnel-archway which led into a huge courtyard paved with asphalte, except in the centre, where a square of somewhat doubtful-hued grass lay around half a dozen half-grown shrubs of laurel. All round this enclosure rose more red and yellow brick walls, towering to such a height as effectually to close out all but the patch of sky which made a canopy over them. At intervals along the walls were the openings of the stair-

ways by which tenants climbed to their various flats or apartments ; these stairways passed at each storey through open balconies, fenced in with iron railings of such a height that children could not climb over them. The whole place was very reminiscent of the married quarters of a barracks, but Laurence noted that a general attempt to give it an air of brightness was made by growing flowers and plants in the boxes attached to the windows.

As the evening was dull and rainy there were few children in evidence about the asphalted square, but the stairways seemed to be full of them—playing, chattering, laughing, quarrelling. Charity passed on to a stairway in the corner where this press of juvenility was much less abundant.

“ This is the quietest part of the place,” she said, turning to her companion, “ but you will have to climb nearly to the top. It is brighter and healthier there.”

She preceded him up seven flights of stairs, and he noticed the vigour of her step, and the fact that she never seemed to be at a loss for breath. Turning along a corridor she at last paused at a door, and drew out a latch-key. Passing through a small lobby she threw open

the door of a parlour, before the open fire of which what seemed to be a small boy knelt with his back to them, evidently engaged in making hot toast. He turned a pale, thin face, lighted by a pair of large dark eyes, towards the door as it opened.

"Dickie," said the girl, "this is the gentleman who stayed at Uncle Waple's at Canterbury—Mr. Workman."

The small figure rose from the hearth and stretched out a thin, almost transparent hand to the visitor, whom he greeted with a few words of old-fashioned welcome. Laurence then recognised that what he had taken to be a small boy was, in reality, a youth or young man of eighteen or possibly twenty, much stunted in growth and badly crippled. He was hunch-backed and pigeon-breasted; one leg, shorter than the other, was furnished with a high boot, and Laurence noticed that when the lad walked he rested a hand on the knee of the limb so shortened.

But thin and pale, and with the traces of past suffering strong upon it as it was, Dickie's face was full of intelligence and perception, and his great eyes possessed power and sympathy and thought. He gave Laurence a

long, scrutinising glance as he bent down to the fire again and resumed his toasting.

"Everything's ready when you are, Charity," he said. "This toast is just done, and then I'll make the tea."

"Dickie," said Charity—who had taken off her hat and jacket and was conveying them into another room—"Dickie is housekeeper and cook and general manager of this establishment, and he is very clever at it, too."

"It's all I can do, you see," said the lad, who was still staring at Laurence. "And one must do something."

"I think it's a great thing to do," said Laurence. "I'm afraid I should have to starve if I did my own cooking, and to live in a state of fearful untidiness if I kept house for myself. But you seem to manage beautifully."

He looked round the little room while the lad busied himself in making the tea. The hearth was bright and clean, and the clear fire sent a cheerful glow over the shining steel of the fender and its properties. In the centre of the room stood the snowy-clothed table, spread with various matters which had apparently come out of Mr. Waple's hamper. There was a cold chicken, flanked by a piece of delicate-tinted ham;



there was an old china dish full of strawberries, and another piled high with crisp lettuce; there was golden-hued butter and bread with a dusky crust, and around all a grateful aroma of tea and toast. And the surroundings of the tea-table seemed to harmonise with it in some subtle way. The walls were of a neutral tint, restful and soothing to the eye; the few pictures hung upon them were old and good engravings; the easy-chairs were deep and comfortable; the one bookcase was filled with carefully-arranged volumes. In the window there were flowers and plants; above them a canary sang in a wooden cage.

"This makes me feel, somehow, as if I really were in England," said Laurence a few minutes later, when they were seated round the table. "It's so—English."

"More English than the Three Travellers?" asked Charity.

"Yes," replied Laurence, with decision. "Because, after all, that was an inn—this is a home."

"We try to make it so," said Charity. "It's all we've got, isn't it, Dickie?"

"I'm satisfied with it," answered the lad. "And more than satisfied," he added, with a look at

his sister which was not lost on Laurence. "You see, sir," he continued, turning to the visitor, "if it hadn't been for Charity there we mightn't have had a home. She made this one."

"Now Dickie, you're not to tell tales!" exclaimed his sister. "Besides, that's not quite true. Uncle Waple gave us that side-board."

"Only one thing out of all the rest," said Dickie. "I say you did it all. You don't know how Charity works, sir," he continued. "Sometimes she works too hard. Then I feel a beast that I can't work."

"But you do work, Dickie," said his sister. "You do nearly everything in the house."

"Oh! I can do all that in two hours a day," answered Dickie. "It's a mere nothing, that."

"I wonder if you could help me in my workshop?" said Laurence. "There are certain things which I am sure you could do—light things. And you could attend to my correspondence."

He was surprised at the almost pathetic eagerness with which the crippled boy seized upon this proposal and coaxed his sister into letting him accept it. But the reason became apparent when, Charity leaving the room,

Dickie laid his hand on Laurence's arm and gripped it with excited fervour.

"I do want to earn some money!" he said. "I—don't say anything—I want to buy Charity a piano. She used to play—once—when we were better off. But when our father died, and there wasn't any money, then—but she's coming back. You understand, don't you?"

Laurence gave him a look which expressed entire understanding.

## CHAPTER XV

While Laurence was spending a quiet and essentially English family sort of evening with the Wrayes—in the course of which his original liking for Charity increased considerably—a certain man in one of the working-class districts of a suburb of Berlin was leisurely making a hearty meal, to which he had been induced to sit down because of Laurence's telegram. The flimsy sheet of paper on which it was written lay on his left hand, and as he ate and drank he glanced at it from time to time, as if to fix upon his memory the full details of route and times and trains which it contained. Once he looked round at the clock on his wall, and went on eating and drinking as steadily as before.

"No hurry," he said to himself, with phlegmatic unconcern, and he cut himself another slice of a formidable-looking sausage and another enormous hunch off a dark-hued loaf of bread. He ate his way steadily through these, consumed a slice of strong-smelling cheese

scarcely less in size, and then drained the wooden measure of beer with a sigh of deep satisfaction. After that, having wiped his great yellow moustache with the palm of his hand, he rose slowly from the table, and, having consulted the clock again, pulled out a well-worn portmanteau from beneath his bed, and began preparations for the journey which Laurence had called upon him to make.

These preparations were soon made. He was already attired in his best—a blue serge suit of the style and sort so much affected by the better-class working men of the Continent, and little remained for him to do but to pack the garments suited to his trade and some changes of linen and articles of toilette. Within a few minutes of finishing his supper he had put on an overcoat and a black slouched hat, and picked up his portmanteau. A glance round the room, and he walked out and locked the door behind him. He had finished the beer, the sausage, and the cheese; rather than take the trouble to pick up the bread and give it to someone outside who might be glad of it, Herman Groot preferred to leave it there on his table and let it grow mouldy. Similarly he preferred to have dust accumulate in his room

during his absence from it to allowing any second person to enter it when he was not there.

Carrying his portmanteau downstairs into the street Herman Groot presently found a tramcar, and boarded it. The tramcar carried him far away across the streets and squares of the capital, until it entered a suburb which was of vastly different appearance from that which he had left. Here were houses and villas enclosed in gardens and high walls; from their windows softly-tinted lights made patches of pleasant colour in the summer evening's dusk. Now and then, after leaving the tramcar and turning into quiet side-alleys canopied with leaves, he caught the sounds of laughter from some merry dinner-party, or of music from some drawing-room. This was where the masters lived—they who had the most of the money.

Herman Groot passed along until he came to a villa of larger size than the rest, which stood in extensive grounds surrounded by a high wall. Passing through the entrance gates he made his way through a mass of shrubbery to a side door, where he rang a bell. A footman, who was obviously of English nationality, responded to his summons. In English Herman Groot addressed him.



"Tell Mr. Francis Armadale that Groot, of the works, is here with a message," he said. "He will understand."

"Come in, if you please," said the footman, and ushered him into a lobby which led into a wider hall. Groot set down his portmanteau and waited, staring at some busts which confronted him from niches in the wall. In two minutes the footman returned, beckoning him to walk up the lobby; another minute, and he found himself in Mr. Francis Armadale's presence. The footman closed the door upon him. Groot turned and made sure that it was really shut. He faced round, when satisfied, upon his employer.

Mr. Francis Armadale was a man of apparently thirty or thirty-two years of age. He had evidently just dined, and was smoking a cigar to the accompaniment of a cup of coffee and a liqueur. Tall, slenderly built, faultless in his evening dress, he looked scarcely the man to concern himself with engines and machines; he might have been taken for an officer of a light cavalry regiment, who desired, amongst other things, to possess a slim waist. Looked at carefully, his face was not too prepossessing to a student of character. It was handsome and regular in feature, but the dark

eyes were a trifle too small and cold, and set more than a trifle too closely together; the lines about the mouth were unpleasant in expression; the chin was weak, and the temples hollow. It was the face of a man who, if he liked, could be cruel.

To Mr. Armadale Groot advanced in silence. Mr. Armadale, who stood, in true British fashion, on the hearthrug with his back to the fire, was equally silent as the workman crossed the room. It was not until he was close upon him that he removed the cigar from his lips and spoke in a low tone.

"Well?" he said.

Groot drew Laurence's telegram from his pocket, and laid it on the table which stood by Francis Armadale's chair.

"It has come," he answered.

Armadale sat down, sipped his coffee, and picking up the telegram read it through in silence.

"He has not been so very long in getting to work," he said musingly. "At least, I take it, by the fact that he wants you, that he is at work. Then you are off—at once?"

Groot repeated the last two words, and then added: "I'm on my way to the station."

"You have money for the journey?"

"Oh, he left that," Groot replied.

"Very well," said Armadale. "Then, of course, we have little to discuss."

Groot stared about him at the books, pictures, and ornaments which surrounded him. He was a big, florid-faced, flaxen-moustached fellow, and had the power of throwing a particularly innocent expression into his face. This expression came over his features now, and he made no answer.

"Is there?" asked Armadale.

Groot coughed behind a huge hand, the fingers of which, however, were supple enough, and even slender.

"I have never been in England before," he said. "From all I hear it is a very expensive country to live in—especially in London."

"Which means, in plain language," said Armadale, "that you want more money every week?"

Groot stared at the ceiling. He made no answer in words.

"Very well," said Armadale. "I suppose you must have it. Half as much again, eh?"

"And a present when——" said Groot, turning his slouched hat round in his hands.

"Oh, of course, a handsome present when

the right moment comes," said Armadale. "A very handsome present. That's fully understood."

Groot turned the slouched hat about once more. "Do I report here, then, as before?" he asked.

"No," replied Armadale; "you don't. That's really the only thing we have to discuss, or rather, that I have to tell you of. No; while you're in London you'll report his progress to Sir John Bedford."

"I know him," said Groot. "I've seen him here."

"Very good," remarked Armadale. "But you won't know him if you see him at the London works, remember, Groot. The evening of your arrival in London I wish you to see him. Now, I don't want you to have any writing on you, for one never knows what may happen. Do you think you can trust your memory if I repeat Sir John's address to you a few times?"

"Yes, once will do, if I then fix it fast in my mind," replied Groot.

"Fix it fast in your mind, then, and don't forget it, or you'll have to consult a directory," said Armadale. "It's 1,000, Queen Anne's Mansions."

Groot, gazing steadily at the crown of his slouched hat, bent his head and mumbled the address over several times; then raised it and nodded confidently. "I've got it," he said. "I shan't forget."

"Very well; I'll advise Sir John that you're coming," said Armadale. "Mind you keep him fully posted up in all that goes on—he's in charge of this affair now. I think that's all, Groot. Go on as you have been doing, and the little present will possibly be bigger than you think. Here, put these cigars in your pocket. I hope you'll have a good journey."

Of this wish and for the cigars Groot made no more acknowledgment than an odd sort of bow. In another minute he was out of the room, and Armadale helped himself to a fresh cigar and poured out more coffee. Then he drew a letter from his pocket, and read it over thoughtfully. When he had restored it to its place he took a turn or two about the room.

"I don't know whether Bedford's new move isn't the best one so far," he said to himself. "After all, we can't be absolutely certain of Sabatier nor of Bremond—I'm sure I wouldn't trust either of them as far as I could see them. And if Groot can find out this time a little more

than he did before we may come in independent of both beauties. He'll have a better chance, anyway. But hang it, what cursed luck I've had over the thing, after being the first to suspect Workman! If only Groot could have found the secret out! Then I shouldn't have had to call in the others, confound it! However, after all, half a loaf (in this case a quarter-loaf, worse luck!) is better than no bread, as they say in England." Then he flung himself into his armchair and picked up a newspaper. "I mustn't forget to send Bedford a long message in cypher to-morrow," he said, as he settled down to read.

But certain matters occurred next morning which made it impossible for Mr. Francis Armadale to attend to any business at all. For some reason or other he overslept himself, and, as no servant in his establishment ever dared to interfere in his master's arrangements, he was unusually late for breakfast. This first made him lose his temper, and afterwards drive his motor-car much too quickly to the works across the city, and at an awkward corner the motor-car was badly upset and its owner thrown out, and he received injuries which made him forget all about writing out elaborate telegrams to Sir



John Bedford, and, in fact, all about everything mundane for the next forty-eight hours.

And so Herman Groot arrived in London, expected by nobody but Laurence Workman, upon whom he had acted as spy for the past two years, and who believed thoroughly in his honesty and faithfulness. Groot rested a little, looked around him a little, and made his way in leisurely fashion to Queen Anne's Mansions, arriving there, in accordance with Francis Armadale's instructions, in the evening. He easily found Sir John Bedford's flat and also the suave-mannered valet who attended to all that great man's needs, and who said that his master was then dining and must not be disturbed. Groot stared at the man with innocent eyes and reiterated that he was Herman Groot, from the Armadale works in Berlin, and must see Sir John Bedford. "I have a message," he added, as by an afterthought.

"Oh, in that case I'll tell him," said the valet, and went away.

Now it so chanced, or occurred, or turned out, that for purposes of his own Sir John Bedford, on leaving the works that evening, had asked Laurence to drive home and dine with him, and Laurence, who knew that he could

begin no active work until Groot's arrival, had consented to this. They had already reached the coffee and cigarettes stage when Groot was entering the Mansions, and, if he had known it, they were talking of him.

"Let's see, you're expecting your man tomorrow, aren't you?" asked Sir John.

"Yes," replied Laurence, "and I shall be glad of his help."

"A good workman?"

"Excellent—quick, intelligent, and full of common sense," replied Laurence.

"And to be trusted?"

"Anywhere and with anything."

"But not with your great secret?"

Laurence laughed. "No; nobody's to be trusted with that," he said.

It was at this point that the valet entered the room and whispered in his master's ear. Sir John started.

"Talk of the ——!" he exclaimed. "Here's a case in point. Show him in."

In another moment Herman Groot was in the room, and the man whom he had come across to betray was staring at him with eyes full of amazement.

## CHAPTER XVI

For perhaps the first time in his life Sir John Bedford sat silently cursing himself for his own stupidity and precipitancy. It was rarely that he ever did anything without a considerable amount of thought and consideration; he believed in looking before you leap, and he seldom entered upon any plan of action without thinking all its eventualities over. Yet in this instance, taken off his guard, he had allowed Herman Groot to walk into Laurence Workman's presence when he, Sir John, ought to have known very well that his flat was the last place on earth where they should meet. He knew from one glance at Laurence's face that he was thunder-struck at Groot's entry; he had half risen from his chair, and was staring at the German as if he could not believe the evidence of his senses. And from him he turned to Sir John, as though to seek some explanation of this meeting, and Sir John, striving to keep an appearance of unconcern, cursed himself for his foolishness more heartily than ever.

If it had been left to Laurence's host to explain anything just then, there might have been an impasse which would have formed a barrier to many things that followed. But there was a cleverer man in the room than Sir John Bedford—a man clever enough to take in the situation in one lightning-swift glance and to save it. In spite of his stolid Saxon countenance, his expression of almost imbecile innocence, Herman Groot was sharp as a weasel and cunning as a fox. He had gone through a fine school of training under Francis Armadale. Mere chance had revealed to that astute gentleman that in Groot he possessed a man who could keep a countenance as blank as a dead wall while his ears were as keen as those of a lynx and his eyes as watchful as those of a hungry kestrel hovering over a hillside. And when he first found that his very promising young assistant, Laurence Workman, was engaged in something which he, Francis Armadale, was far-seeing enough to know would be epoch-making, it was Groot whom he suggested to him as a mechanical helper, knowing that Groot could be trusted to see all that went on and to report on it. And so Groot had trained eyes and ears until he was as wide awake to all possibilities as a Red Indian.

Groot rose to the situation now. From the very instant of his entry into Sir John Bedford's dining-room he had recognised that no message respecting him had arrived from Francis Armadale. Otherwise, Laurence Workman would not have been there. It was obvious that Sir John Bedford did not expect him; just as obvious that Sir John was sorely put to it to explain his presence. Very well, then, he, Groot, would himself explain it. And to give his quickly-moving brain sufficient time to act he remained quite passive in the place which he had taken up by the door, having first made a polite bow to Laurence, as his employer, and then to Sir John, as his employer's host.

"Why, Groot!" exclaimed Laurence; "whatever brings you here?"

Groot wore his air of extreme innocence. "I came to see Sir John Bedford, sir," he answered.

"I'm Sir John Bedford," said the predominant partner in Armadales', who began to see that the man was deeper than he looked. "Take a seat."

Groot took a chair near the door, and turned the slouched hat round in his hands while he studied the ceiling.

"But why didn't you come straight to

me?" asked Laurence. "I telegraphed the address."

"Because I lost the address, Mr. Workman. I drew some papers out of my pocket on the boat and a sudden gust blew them away—it among them," replied Groot. "And so when I arrived in London, only an hour ago, I did not know how to find you. But I knew that Sir John Bedford would probably know—I have seen you at the works in Berlin, sir, often—so I procured a directory and sought Sir John's name."

"Very wise thing to do," said Sir John, who admired Groot for the ready way in which he put together this—to him—very palpable lie. "Here, help yourself to a glass of wine. You'll feel tired after your journey."

Groot accepted this offer of hospitality with a bow, which he repeated as he glanced over the rim of his glass in the direction of his entertainer.

"This fellow wants to see me privately," he thought. "He's got something to tell—some message from Francis Armadale, no doubt." Then he said aloud: "Have you made any arrangements for your assistant, Workman?"

"Yes," replied Laurence, "I have got rooms



for him close to mine. And now that Groot has arrived and found me, I shall ask you to excuse me, Sir John, so that I may take him there. We must be at work early in the morning, Groot."

Groot took another mouthful of wine and nodded. To anyone who did not know him it would have seemed that in his opinion words were things to be used with the strictest economy. He replenished his glass at a further invitation from Sir John, and continued to sip its contents while his big blue eyes stared around the dining-room, at pictures, ornaments, at the glass and flowers and fruit on the table.

"Crafty—deuced crafty!" said Sir John to himself.

A sudden idea struck him. Laurence was plainly fidgeting to get away; it was just as plain that Groot desired some conversation with him—Sir John. And so, as if he had only just remembered his duties as a host, he said, with great geniality:

"I say, Workman, if your assistant has only just got in he must be hungry. You haven't had supper, have you, Groot?"

Groot caught a glance of Sir John's eye, and responded to it. "No, sir," he replied.

"Then you shall have it here," said Sir John. He rang the bell, and gave some orders to the confidential servant, who appeared in person to answer it. Then he turned to Laurence: "While Groot is supping," he said, "I'll show you those drawings and diagrams we were speaking of. Come into my study."

Impatient as Laurence was to get away with Groot, to whom he wanted to talk about the work before them, he was too much of an enthusiast about any mechanical matters not to be interested in anything relating to them, and in five minutes he was completely absorbed in a magnificent portfolio of drawings which Sir John laid on a table in his study. Sir John lingered at his elbow for a while, discussing this and that, and then left him with the remark that he would just see if Groot was getting on all right.

"The poor chap must have been hungry," he said, "and he'll no doubt feel shy in a strange land."

"It's very kind of you," murmured Laurence, and went back to the drawing which he was just then absorbed in. He had already half forgotten Groot's existence.

Sir John found his strange guest eating and

drinking of the good fare set before him as stolidly and steadily as he had munched at his sausage and bread in his Berlin lodgings. He closed the door gently, and went up to the German.

"You have some message for me—from Francis Armadale, eh?" he said.

Groot nodded—his mouth was full. "Yes," he said. "To come here as soon as I got to London, and in future to report to you instead of to him."

"Good—keep your eyes open. But don't come here, and don't ever speak to me alone at the works. Understand?"

Groot gave him one of the nods which were more eloquent than words.

"That's right," said Sir John. "I like men who say little and think much—and who keep their thoughts to themselves, too," he added, in an undertone.

He went across to a small escritoire, and picking up a blank card scribbled a couple of lines on it.

"Take this," he said. "You see—Café Victorine, Soho. You'll easily find it. Meet me outside on Sunday at seven o'clock."

Groot, who had now finished, rose from the

table, and wiping his big moustache with his characteristic gesture—that is, by complacently stroking it with the palm of his hand—took the card and examined it carefully. Then he walked over to the open fireplace and, tearing the card in two, dropped it into the flames.

“What’s that for?” asked Sir John.

“It had your writing on it,” replied Groot. “I never carry writing. I have the address here”—he tapped his forehead. “I shall be there.”

Sir John nodded his admiration of this ability, gave Groot a cigar, and returned to Laurence, who was just completing his inspection of the portfolio.

“He seems a clever fellow, this man you have brought over,” said Sir John, as he presently put the portfolio away.

“Groot is a man of few words, and slow in thought,” answered Laurence. “No initiator, you know, but well capable of executing mechanically whatever is given him to do. He has always served me well. And now, if you please, Sir John, I will take him away, for I mean us to be at work early in the morning.”

“You’re evidently a glutton for work,” said Sir John.

"I've wasted so much time," replied Laurence gravely.

Five minutes later he and his man were gone, and Sir John was left alone. He spent some little time walking up and down his study, apparently deep in thought, then, going into the dining-room, he mixed himself a glass of whisky-and-soda at the sideboard and drank the contents leisurely. That done, he rang for coat and hat.

"I'm going out, Shepheard," he said to the confidential servant, "and perhaps I may be back late, and perhaps not at all. Leave the usual things out, in case I come home."

Mr. Shepheard replied to this behest in his usual respectful manner, and presently saw his master out of the flat. This done he came back to the dining-room, and did exactly what Sir John had done a few minutes earlier—mixed himself a very satisfactory-looking drink, and placing himself with his back to the fire, proceeded to consume it with every appearance of enjoyment. With the glass half empty, he placed it on the mantelpiece behind him, and selected a cigar from a cabinet which stood in the centre. With this fairly alight, and after another calling upon the glass for refreshment,

Mr. Shepherd began to clear the dinner-table, fetching a tray from some inner region for that purpose, and going about all his subsequent performances with the deliberation characteristic of a man who knows that he is not at all pressed for time. The table cleared, the white linen replaced by a soft, velvet-surfaced cloth, and the latter decorated with china bowls full of fragrant roses, Mr. Shepherd returned to the mantelpiece and once more warmed his back.

"These June nights, Thomas, my boy, are chilly, when all is said of summer," he remarked to himself. "A little fire is welcome. So, after the heat and burden of the day, is a quiet drink."

In proof of this statement Mr. Shepherd again repaired to the decanter and the syphon, and with a replenished glass once more reclined against the mantelpiece.

"Nothing very striking to-day, Thomas," he said. "No interesting letters or callers. What about the German chap, though?—he's never been here before. Something to do with the other fellow, no doubt. Well, shall I go round to the club or do an hour or two at one of the halls?"

Undecided as to which of these methods of



spending the remainder of the evening would be best, Mr. Shephard, cigar in mouth, and hands beneath the tails of his coat, began to pace round and round the dining-room, apparently in deep thought. And in thus progressing his eye suddenly fell on the blotting-pad which lay on his master's *escritoire*. The blotting-paper had been freshly put in that morning—two or three words only marred its whiteness.

"That's the best of always seeing that he uses clean blotting-paper," thought the confidential servant. "What's he been writing?"

With a dexterity plainly born of long practice Mr. Shephard whipped the top sheet out of the pad, and, going to the centre table, held it between himself and the strong light of the electric lamp. The words written on the card given by Sir John Bedford to Groot came out clearly—*Café Victorine, Soho, 7. Sunday.*

"*Café Victorine, Soho,*" soliloquised Mr. Shephard. "Why, that's an eighteenpenny shop with vinegar thrown in! What's he know of it? And what's he up to now? More underground business, I expect. *Café Victorine, 7. Sunday, eh? Right-o!*"

Mr. Shephard replaced the blotting-paper in

the pad, and, having returned to his glass again, observed that he thought he would stay at home that night and be comfortable. Having thus decided he chose the easiest of the easy-chairs, put his feet upon another, and picking up a newspaper proceeded to read the news of the day.

If anyone had been rude enough to lean over the back of the chair in which Mr. Shephard reclined at his ease, and had looked over his shoulders to see what he read, they would have observed very quickly that the mental fabulum afforded by the highly respectable journal which he held was not quite suited to his tastes. The leading and special articles were to him arid deserts of print; the "turn-over" was a thing to be avoided; the foreign news was meaningless. He turned instinctively to the racing news; then to the cricket reports; then to turning the paper listlessly over, as if in search of some intellectual tit-bit more to his fancy.

"Dry as tinder, this," said Mr. Shephard, not troubling to stifle a hearty yawn. "Give me——"

What he was about to desire he did not say, for at that moment his eye caught a name in a brief paragraph at the foot of a column, and

he involuntarily uttered a sharp exclamation as he jumped to his feet and held the paper nearer to the light. And he read aloud—slowly—these words, evidently of great import to him :

“A convict named Edward Penrose, who was undergoing a long term of penal servitude, effected his escape yesterday morning from Dartmoor Prison, and has, so far, not been recaptured.”

Mr. Shephard stood staring at this sentence for a full minute. Then, with a curious exclamation, he turned to the mantelpiece and, seizing his glass, emptied its contents into the soil of a jardinière in the window. After that he threw his cigar into the fire, and going to his own room took off his coat and vest, and plunged his head into cold water. Ten minutes later he left the flat, and hurried away into more spacious regions.

## CHAPTER XVII

No one who had seen Mr. Shepheard walk out of Queen Anne's Mansions and make his way into Victoria Street would have guessed that he was inwardly about as much perturbed and disturbed as a man well can be. In his neat dark overcoat, his shining top hat, his lacquered boots, his well-fitting gloves, and with his natty umbrella, he looked a picture of smug prosperity and propriety, and nobody would have thought that he had either a care in the world or a knotty problem to vex his soul. But, in point of fact, Mr. Shepheard was sorely vexed in spirit, and in a fairly clear space of the street he began to proceed at a slower pace and to swing his umbrella as if he were in a state of indecision. This, however, quickly passed, and he set off westward at a sharper walk than before.

"No!" he muttered to himself. "It's no use lingering. If they didn't recapture Ned Penrose within a couple of hours or so they'll

never get him. We didn't call him Slippery Dick for nothing! Like as not, he's in town by now. And if he is—ugh!"

This concluding reflection afforded Mr. Shephard so little pleasure that he involuntarily quickened his pace and cast a backward glance over his shoulder as if he thought somebody was about to hail him or to tap him on the back. Nobody being there he walked still faster.

"And besides," he said to himself, "I'm about sick of Bedford. I never know what's going to happen. I'm standing to win I don't know what—perhaps not so much, and to lose all. Now's my time, if ever. A mere change of name, and Leonie and myself will be Monsieur and Madame Somebody-or-other, proprietor and proprietress of that charming little hotel that we know of. That's a much better prospect—much better. Oh yes, it's the right thing to do."

With these and more cryptic—cryptic, at any rate, to whoever had overheard them—references to whatever it was that was in his active mind, Mr. Shephard made his way beyond Victoria and turned in the direction of Eaton Square. It was almost dark by that

time, but he walked about until the darkness was quite fallen ; then he went up to one of the houses on the south side, and having first given a preliminary tinkle at the bell descended the steps of the area.

The area door was opened by a parlourmaid, who gave every indication of having been disturbed at her supper. Peering out into the gloom she suddenly became aware of the identity of the caller, and opened the door still wider.

“ Good evening, Mr. Shephard,” she said. “ It’s that dark that I couldn’t see who it was at first.”

“ It’s not that dark that I couldn’t recognise the charming Miss Higginson,” said Mr. Shephard, gallantly, as he removed his shining hat and stepped in. “ Such charms and graces cannot be hidden by the dark of a summer night.”

“ Oh, you go along ! ” said Miss Higginson. “ I wonder what Mamzel Leony would say if she heard you ? ”

“ She would say that I did rightly to appreciate such beauty,” replied Mr. Shephard, drawing off his gloves in the little lobby-parlour, furnished with one table, four chairs, a sofa, and a picture of the Black Brunswicker



over the fireplace, into which Miss Higginson had shown him. "But apropos, as the saying is, is it possible to see ma'amselle?"

"Oh, I should think so," replied the parlour-maid. "I don't think she's doing anything, unless she's sewing in Miss Delomosne's rooms. I'll go and see, Mr. Shepherd."

"So shall my soul thank you," said Mr. Shepherd. "But half-a-mo', as the vulgar say: anybody here to-night? Anybody to dinner—any party or anything?"

"Nobody that I know of," replied Miss Higginson. "No, I'm sure there isn't. Sir Herbert's asleep in the study, and Miss D.'s playing the piano in the drawing-room."

"Then summon ma'amselle to our presence," commanded Mr. Shepherd. "But in all secrecy, mind."

"Oh, I know," responded the parlourmaid. "I understand." And she went off giggling, and declaring that Mr. Shepherd was a queer one; while that gentleman, having got out of his gloves, placed them, his umbrella, and his hat, upon the table, and, having smoothed his hair, took a seat on the sofa, as being the softest, and awaited the coming of his fiancée.

Mademoiselle Leonie, on arrival, proved to

have been, as Miss Higginson had suggested, engaged in sewing, and, like all her industrious countrywomen, who never waste a moment if they can help it, she had brought her sewing along with her. Unlike the French ladies'-maids whom one sees in delightful pieces on the stage—always young, always pretty, invariably saucy and piquant, and dressed in ravishing if simple fashion—Mademoiselle Leonie was thirty-five if she was a day, and neither pretty nor coquettish. Instead, she was one of those strong, capable, managing-looking Frenchwomen of whom one sees thousands in their own cities, who sit at the receipt of custom in the shops and restaurants, help their husbands to run hotels and cafés, and generally exhibit themselves as possessed of many capacities of which Englishwomen are destitute.

She gazed upon Mr. Shepherd with calmness. "Eh, bien!" she said. "And why this visit to-night?"

Mr. Shepherd gave Mademoiselle Leonie one look and the door another. "Speak in thine own language, Leonie, my dear," he said in French. "I have that to say to thee which is only for thine own ears. Leonie, thou

rememberest that packet which I confided to thee some weeks ago, and bade thee to keep in great safety ? ”

“ Well, then ? ” said Mademoiselle Leonie, placidly stitching away at her sewing.

“ Fetch it to me, my dear,” commanded Mr. Shephard.

Still placid, mademoiselle laid down her sewing on the table and rose to leave the room. Mr. Shephard arrested her movements with an uplifted finger.

“ Hold, Leonie ! ” he said. “ Listen, I want to have speech with Miss Delomosne—alone, you understand. It will affect you and me ; it will bring the little hotel nearer, much nearer, my dear. Arrange it. Tell her Sir John Bedford’s man, Shephard, has a private message for her—private, aye ! Thou understandest, Leonie ? ”

The Frenchwoman looked at him for a moment, then nodded her head. “ Very well,” she said, and went away.

For ten minutes Mr. Shephard sat on the sofa, revolving many memories and anticipating more futures, and staring blankly at the Black Brunswicker. Then his lady-love returned, placed a small packet in his hands, and said, briefly, “ This way, then ; she will see you.”

"Half-a-mo'," said Mr. Shepherd, relapsing into English. "Let's see. Yes, that's all right—four seals in red wax, just as I did it up. Leonie, my dear," he continued, resuming his French, "after I have seen mademoiselle I want to see you again. You understand?"

"Perfectly," replied Mademoiselle Leonie. "Here, then, I will await your return. Now follow."

Ushering Mr. Shepherd upstairs, through a house which seemed singularly destitute of life, the Frenchwoman showed him at last into a small room fitted up as a study, and shut the door upon him. Miss Delomosne sat by a writing-table, looking at him with some curiosity. Mr. Shepherd made his best professional bow.

"You have a message for me, Shepherd, Leonie tells me," said Miss Delomosne.

Mr. Shepherd bowed again. "Yes, miss," he replied. "I hope we are quite alone."

Miss Delomosne's fine eyebrows elevated themselves. "Quite alone?" she said. "Of course we are quite alone. You are very mysterious to-night, Shepherd."

Mr. Shepherd took the liberty of drawing a step or two nearer Miss Delomosne's table, and he lowered his voice.

"Well, miss," he said, "you'll forgive me—it's really in your own interests, miss. The fact is, I had resort to a little subterfuge. The message I wanted to give you is from—myself."

Miss Delomosne looked at Mr. Shephard with an expression which showed that she was somewhat puzzled, somewhat annoyed, and somewhat doubtful as to whether her visitor was not mad or drunk. The visitor was quick to interpret the mixed quality of this expression, and he smiled.

"I'm perfectly sober, miss, and quite sane," he said. "Leonie wouldn't have let me come up if I hadn't been both."

"What is it you have to say to me, Shephard?" asked Miss Delomosne.

Mr. Shephard sank his voice to a still lower depth. "This, miss: You're in Sir John Bedford's power!"

Miss Delomosne half rose from her seat, then dropped back. She had turned very pale, and her eyes glowed out of white cheeks as she stared at the valet.

"How dare you——" she began.

But Mr. Shephard, smiling quietly, stopped her with uplifted hand. "It's no use, miss," he said. "I know what I'm talking about. The

fact is, miss, there's not much that I don't know about anything with which Sir John has to do. And I know that you are in his power," he concluded, with quiet emphasis.

Miss Delomosne continued to stare at him.

"There's no need to be frightened, miss," he went on. "If you only knew it, you'll be all the happier after this interview. And"—here he dropped his voice until it was scarcely audible to the half-frightened, wholly inquisitive woman before him—"you'll feel—safer!"

Miss Delomosne made a supreme effort, and summoned all her powers. For a moment she remained silent; then she turned resolutely on her visitor.

"Say plainly what you want to say, Shepheard," she said. "I'm quite sure you didn't come here simply to say what you have said."

"No, miss; that's true," replied the valet. "Well, what I have to say is this: I know that you're in Sir John Bedford's power because he's in possession of a secret of yours."

"Go on," she said.

"A secret that's referred to in some letters of yours of which he got hold, miss."

"Go on," she said again.

Mr. Shepheard took his time. He smiled.



"I daresay you'd give something to get hold of those letters, miss, wouldn't you?" he said.

Miss Delomosne's mind suddenly became illuminated as to the reason of Mr. Shephard's visit. A fierce, almost tigerish eagerness sprang up in her, allied with a vision of new hope for the future, and she half leaped from her chair.

"Give something!" she exclaimed. "Get me those letters, and I'll give you——"

"Yes, miss, how much?" asked Mr. Shephard.

But Miss Delomosne had dropped back into her chair, and was shaking her head. "It's no use!" she said. "You might more easily drag a soul out of hell!"

"I said—how much will you give, miss?" went on Mr. Shephard.

Miss Delomosne bent forward, eagerly. "You don't mean to say that you could get them, Shephard?" she asked.

"I mean to say, miss, that I have got them," replied the valet. "They are in my pocket at this moment, and at your service, if you pay me my price. The fact is, miss, I have very particular private reasons of my own for leaving Sir John Bedford, and as I want a modest capital I am willing to sell you the letters we

have spoken of for the sum of one thousand pounds—and dirt cheap, too, miss!" he added.

Miss Delomosne looked at him steadily for a moment. "Very good," she said. "Let me see that they are all there."

"Quite so, miss," answered Mr. Shephard; "but you'll allow me to keep a hand on them until you're satisfied that they are."

Half an hour later Mr. Shephard left Miss Delomosne's rooms with five hundred pounds in notes and a cheque for a like amount, made payable to "cash," in his breast pocket. He had a brief audience with Mademoiselle Leonie in the presence of the Black Brunswicker, and subsequently departed, well pleased with himself. But he made no return to Queen Anne's Mansions, and after spending the night near Victoria, and cashing his cheque early next morning, he departed for Dieppe, and felt very glad to see the last of Newhaven Harbour.

And that morning Miss Delomosne woke with the feeling that she was at last free. She was the slave of Sir John Bedford no longer. Now she would fight, and fight bitterly, for the other side.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Now that Herman Groot had arrived Laurence threw himself into his work with an activity which was feverish in its persistency and application. He was at the workshop with dawn, and remained there until late at night. He grudged time for meals, and would carry his breakfast and dinner with him rather than waste ten minutes in going to and from his lodgings. When he finally broke away from his task at night it was only because he had become so physically exhausted that he could do no more than hasten home, throw himself on his bed, and fall instantly into deep slumber. Before a fortnight had gone by he became so absorbed and so anxious that he bought a camp-bed and had it put up in the office, and on it as often as not he spent his short nights.

Meanwhile, Groot worked steadily at the mechanical labour for which Laurence had specially brought him over. He worked in his

usual slow, thorough fashion, talking little, but keeping his eyes open, especially on the work which Laurence did with his own hands. And he saw that at the rate things were going the invention would soon be complete.

Groot met Sir John Bedford at the Café Victorine on the first Sunday evening after his arrival, and made his report. There was little to tell on that occasion, but a week later there was much.

"If the work goes forward as rapidly as at present," said Groot, "he will finish in ten days. The body of the machine is well on its way to completion now."

"Have you learnt any more than you knew before?" asked Sir John.

Groot shook his head emphatically. "No," he replied. "Everything has been done on the same lines. I don't even know where the engine is being made—I've tried to learn that from his letters, but nothing seems to come there. It's my belief that he'll not fit it until the last moment. One thing I do know—whatever the engine may be, and whatever force it is that he's going to use as motive power, there's one thing certain, and that is that the engine itself must be very small and light,

because of the space reserved for it. It is beyond me to conceive what the secret of propulsion is which he has discovered."

Sir John, who thought that Sabatier might be much more likely to inform him on this point, said nothing.

"Well, keep your eyes open, Groot," he remarked as they parted. "What I'm chiefly concerned about is not so much the making of the thing as the exact date when it will be finished. I want to be informed at once when this engine has been fitted."

Groot finished off the lager beer with which he had been provided, and shook his head gloomily. "I don't think he'll let me know that," he said. "He'll do the final things himself in secret, and he'll not allow my presence."

"Well, at any rate you'll know when the thing's ready for the engine," said Sir John. "As you get to the end keep me informed—every hour, if it's possible to do so."

"It's not easy to get out when he's there," said Groot. "The place is always locked at both doors, and he keeps the key in his pocket."

An idea occurred to Sir John. He knew that there were no duplicate keys of the workshop,

and that the locks were of an intricate pattern. It would have been a useful thing to have had duplicates of the keys made before handing them over to Laurence.

"Have you never had the keys in your hands?" he asked.

Groot shook his head.

"Couldn't you make some excuse for getting hold of them?" said Sir John.

"He never parts with them," answered Groot. "He lets me in and lets me out. But supposing I did get them?"

"Take an impression of them in wax," said Sir John. "Use your ingenuity—mislay some necessary tool or other, and ask for the keys so that you may go across to get another. Something of that sort—you can manage it. I'll make it all right for you if you do."

"I'll try," said Groot. "But he's as keen as a cat watching a mouse."

There was somebody else in Laurence's workshop who was watching the work going on there with eyes almost as keen as those of the inventor himself. Dickie Wraye, in fulfilment of the agreement between Laurence and himself, had daily taken up his position in the workshop and had quickly made himself



a member of its small community. Deeply interested in what he saw the first day, he was absolutely fascinated before the week was out, and if Laurence would have allowed him he would have remained in the workshop as long as Laurence himself did. In spite of his infirmities Dickie was active and alert, and his intelligence was keen enough. Like so many cripples he was very skilful with his fingers, and Laurence soon found that the boy could make himself useful in several directions. And so Dickie began to rise an hour earlier in order to get the housework done at the flat before breakfast, and when the washing-up was completed at the end of the meal he stumped away eagerly to the workshop, where his knock sounded on the private door at precisely nine o'clock. It was all that Laurence could do to force him away in time to prepare the evening meal for himself and his sister.

"Look here, Dickie," said Charity one evening, when she thought her brother looked pale and fatigued. "I can't have you doing too much at Mr. Workman's place. You're not strong, you know, and you'll be ill if you go on like that."

"I shan't—I shan't!" exclaimed Dickie.

"Don't say anything to Mr. Workman, Charity! I'm all right—I am, indeed. Work? Why, you should see how Mr. Workman goes at it. I should think he begins as soon as ever it's light in the morning, and we always leave him there at night."

"Yes, but he's a strong man," said Charity. "And he's beginning to look worn and tired. I passed him in the street the other day, going to the offices, and he was so absorbed that he didn't see me, and he looked as if he'd never been to bed all night."

"Very likely he hadn't," said the boy. "He often looks as if he slept in his clothes. I know he's tired in the morning. I say, Charity."

"Well—what?"

"Mr. Workman never goes anywhere now," said Dickie. "Don't you think it would do him a lot of good to spend the evening somewhere?"

"I should think it would—a great deal of good," replied his sister.

"Well, ask him to come here, then, some evening soon," said Dickie. "He'd come for you."

Charity, who was sewing, let her work drop in her lap, and stared at her brother with

surprised eyes. A heightened colour came into her cheeks.

"Come—for—me!" she repeated. "What do you mean, Dickie—what are you talking about?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Dickie. "But I think he thinks a lot of you. He said the other day that you were a brave girl to work as hard as you do. And why shouldn't he think of you? Perhaps he might want to marry you."

"Don't be so silly, child!" exclaimed Charity. "And don't talk to Mr. Workman or to anybody else about me; it isn't nice to be talked about in that way, Dickie, you know."

"I don't see that it matters if it's only nice things that are said," contended Dickie, stoutly. "And I'm sure Mr. Workman never says anything but nice things about you. He often talks to me about meeting you for the first time at Uncle Waple's."

"I wish he wouldn't, then," said Charity, bending over her work. "What is there to talk about in that?"

"I don't know, but he seems to like to talk about it," replied Dickie. "Ask him to come and have supper with us on Sunday, Charity."

"No," said Charity, firmly, "I shan't. But,"

she added, seeing the disappointment in the boy's face, "if you like, Dickie, you can ask him—for both of us. But I don't think he will come, just now; he'll be too much absorbed in his work."

There was someone else who was desirous of Laurence's company, if only for an evening, but from a very different motive from that which inspired Dickie Wraye. Sir John Bedford had made a hurried trip over to Normandy, and had spent a few hours with M. Sabatier, only to find that that great genius was not getting along with his work as quickly as he had expected. Something had gone wrong with one of his calculations, and he was perforce obliged to recommence a good deal of his work. He was in a bad temper, and short and snappy with his confrère, who, on his part, was surly and peevish.

"At this rate," he grumbled, as he and M. Sabatier turned to a cigar and a glass of cognac after a morning's useless task over figures and diagrams—"at this rate the fellow will have finished his machine and very probably sold it to the British Government before you've done!"

"Sacribleu!" growled the great man.

"And is that my fault? Who but I could have done what I have? Who but I in all Europe—yes, in all the world—could have wrung the man's secret out of his memoranda? Who but I could have clothed the dry bones of his data with palpitating flesh? Could you? Could Bremond? Could the Armadale of Berlin? No, my friend, none of you. It is only I, Paul Sabatier, who could do it. Rest tranquil, then, until the task is complete."

"All very well, but he'll get in first if you're not quick," said Sir John.

M. Sabatier sipped his petit verre and waved his hands. "It was to be your task to prevent that, my friend," he said. "You have him and his work under observation; take care of him."

And Sir John decided that it was time Laurence's progress should be retarded. In accordance with the formal agreement between them he could not make any demand on Laurence's services for the firm until a date still far enough removed to make it probable that Laurence's private work would be completed ere it was reached. The thing to do was to get him away from his work now and then. But he must find strong means of doing that. His thoughts turned to Miss Delomosne,

and one afternoon, immediately after his return from M. Sabatier's, he repaired to Sir Herbert Armadale's town house and demanded to see her.

"Look here," he said, without preface or beating about the bush, "you're not doing all that you might do as regards that fellow, Workman. You remember what I said at Hurstdene Manor?"

"I am not very likely to forget it," said Miss Delomosne, coldly.

"Very good. You can speak as if you were in the middle of a refrigerator yourself and desired to freeze me too, if you like. All the same, I expect my wishes to be carried out," he said. "It's in my interest just now to make this chap waste even a little time. You must help."

"Oh! And may I ask how?" she said.

"I'll tell you that without your asking," he answered. "Armadale's going to take a small party for a week-end up the river, and young Workman's to be asked. You must second the invitation with a personal note from yourself, which you will carefully word in the best way to make him come. But more than that: to-morrow evening I shall make him come and



dine with me at the Carlton. Armadale's coming, and you'll come too——"

"Thank you. And supposing I don't wish to?"

"I said you'll come too," he repeated, looking her in the eyes with a glance familiar enough to her, "and you'll second your letter in person. Write the letter at once. And make the most of your opportunities to-morrow evening—you know how!" he concluded, with a sneer.

Miss Delomosne made no reply. She knew that she was out of his power now, but she was not minded to make him aware of the fact yet. A more fitting and convenient time would come—would surely soon be there. She could wait until then.

"By-the-by," said Sir John, with his hand on the door, "wasn't that French maid of yours, Leonie, engaged to my man, Shepherd, or something of the sort?"

"I am not acquainted with Leonie's love affairs," answered Miss Delomosne.

"I heard something of it," said Sir John. "Ring for her. I want to speak to her."

"You cannot. Leonie has left me."

"Left you? Suddenly?" he asked.

"Quite suddenly. Being a Frenchwoman, she has taken French leave."

"Then I'll bet a million to one she's gone off with Shepheard!" he exclaimed. "For he's gone too, and in just the same way. It's a queer thing. There's nothing missing, and his accounts are perfectly straight, too. He'd been with me for years—Shepheard; I thought he was a fixture. I treated him quite confidentially, too."

"He must have been in possession of some pleasant secrets!" she could not help saying, with a sneer.

"Not all my secrets—not yours!" he said, meaningly. "Well, I'm off. Bear in mind all I've said."

"I will bear it in mind," she replied.

Sir John waylaid Laurence next morning, and, on the plea of most urgent business, literally forced him into accepting his invitation to dine at the Carlton that evening.

"And you'll do with the change, Workman," he said. "Why, man, you'll kill yourself if you go on like that!"

"I will take the evening off," said Laurence. "But it's all I can spare. I had an invitation from Sir Herbert for the week-end which I should have liked to accept, but I really daren't. I must get on as quickly as possible."

"How soon will you finish?" asked Sir John, casually.

"Oh, in eight to ten days," replied Laurence.

"Ah, you're getting along famously," said Sir John. "Well, we're all anxious to see your finished product. But the secret's still there, I suppose?"

Laurence laughed. "Yes," he said; "it's still there."

## CHAPTER XIX

On the morning of the day on which Laurence was to dine at the Carlton with Sir John Bedford he received a note from Miss Delomosne. Had Sir John been privileged to look over his shoulder as he read it, that very designing gentleman would have been somewhat surprised at its contents. As a matter of fact, Miss Delomosne, who was evolving certain plans of her own—having for their object something not at all in accordance with Sir John's intentions—had decided to write to Laurence in order to put Sir John off the scent. But the note was little more than a mere formality.

"DEAR MR. WORKMAN," it ran, "my guardian tells me that he has asked you to join his party for the river from Saturday to Monday. I am sure it would give us great pleasure if you could see your way to accept his invitation." She signed herself "Yours sincerely, Lilian Delomosne," and Laurence, who had not seen her handwriting before, was much struck by its grace

and firmness. He put the letter away in his pocket-book.

"But I mustn't go," he said. "Three days of absence—even two—no, that is out of the question."

He had several letters to read that morning. The next one he took up, enclosed in a square envelope, addressed in typescript, and bearing the stamp of a S.W. office, was typed on a foolscap sheet, and had neither address, date nor signature. Thinking it some circular, Laurence merely glanced at it—catching a word here and there; and then he suddenly uttered a sharp exclamation, carried the sheet over to the window of his lodgings, and read it over with a frown on his forehead.

"The writer," he read, "knows that you are engaged in a great enterprise, and, in wishing you success, desires to warn you against persons who are endeavouring to profit by your labours. When you remember that you have had papers and plans stolen from you on two occasions you cannot fail to realise that you have secret enemies, whose methods are as crafty as they are relentless. Those enemies may be nearer than you think. You may be perfectly certain, at any rate, that they are well acquainted with

your movements, and are bent on discovering your secrets. Permit the writer to give you a piece of sound advice: Do not relax your vigilance for an hour, and when it comes to the critical moment of your work be as watchful and careful as if your workshop were surrounded by an army of spies. It is impossible to tell you in this letter how your enemies are resolved on robbing you of your discovery. They have, the writer repeats, twice succeeded in stealing your plans; take care that the third time does not see them rob you of something much more valuable than they were. Once more—be watchful, and be suspicious of even your so-called best friends.”

Laurence put this communication in his pocket with a feeling of anger, surprise, and apprehension all mingled together. Like all honest and straightforward men he abhorred anything in the shape of anonymous letters, and his first instinct as regards this was to tear it up, and throw the shreds into his waste-paper basket. But there was something in the letter which seemed to him to ring true; it was evidently written by some person who was acquainted with some undoubtedly true episodes in the history of his invention. Who could that person be?



And—much more disturbing, perplexing, harassing thought—who could the unknown enemies be, who worked, like moles in the dark?

Laurence's temperament was destitute of desire to injure; to prove himself the designing enemy of any human being was beyond him; he therefore could not understand how anyone could plot against him with desire to rob him of his work. And yet there the plain facts were—he had twice during the past two years been successfully robbed of plans and diagrams. These things were undoubtedly stolen by some person or persons who desired to possess them. Who were they?

Leaving his breakfast untasted, Laurence walked up and down his sitting-room, thinking. "Of course," he thought, "there were people who knew I was always inventing something or other from boyhood. My father knew, and my mother; Mr. Francis Armadale knew, and so did some of the heads of departments. I dare-say some of them knew that during the last year or two I was at work on something uncommon. But who of all these people would want to steal my plans? They were all friends."

He drew the anonymous letter from his

pocket again, and referred to one sentence in it—that which referred to his enemies being nearer than he thought. But who could there be amongst those who were near? Because, after all, there was no one so really near but Herman Groot.

The idea of suspecting Herman Groot was as impossible to Lawrence as it would have been to suspect his father or mother. Poor, plodding, not-over-lively Groot, with whom he had worked side by side for so long, and for whom he had come to have something like affection. No, he could not doubt his assistant's good faith for a moment. Groot had never been brilliant; he was the sort of workman to whom one had to explain carefully exactly what he was to do, and who would then do it with mechanical accuracy, but he was not a man of initiative, and Lawrence doubted if he had sufficient imagination to form a scheme for robbing him of his ideas. Besides—what use could Groot make of them? No, he could not doubt or suspect Groot.

He made an attempt to eat some breakfast, and then hurried off to the workshop, later than he had been since he and Groot commenced operations. Groot was there before him, leaning against the wall and smoking a big-bowled pipe.

Laurence, eyeing him over as he walked up, considered him the very incarnation of innocence. His big, placid face, with its calm blue eyes and great drooping moustache, was childlike in its candour.

Laurence, once inside the workshop, called Groot into the office. He drew the anonymous letter from his pocket-book and opened it out on the desk at which Dickie Wraye, greatly to his own delight, transacted whatever secretarial work there was to do.

"Look here, Groot," he said. "Read that."

Groot picked up the foolscap sheet, held it within six inches of his nose, and read it through without a tremor or a sign. Having got through it, he laid it down, took off his cloth cap, and scratched his head.

"That's queer!" he said. "Enemies, eh?"

"Of course you remember that I had my plans stolen twice, Groot?" said Laurence.

"So you told me," answered Groot. "That's queer, too."

"Well, there must be somebody who is after my work," said Laurence.

"It seems like it," replied Groot.

"You never see anybody about here, do you?" asked Laurence.

"I?" said Groot. "No—never. How could they get in? You have the keys."

"Yes, of course. I meant hanging about."

"I never see anybody. I go straight home, and I come straight here," said Groot. "The hours are too long to let one idle about. I'm always for my bed when we've done."

"Well, we can have a good rest then," said Laurence. "Now look here, Groot, I'm not going to leave this place now, day or night, until I've finished. But to-night I've promised to dine with Sir John, so I shall want you to stay here on guard. I'll have a real good supper sent in for you, and some cigars and beer, and you'll sleep all right on the camp-bed. After that I'll stay here myself every night."

"All right," said Groot; "I'll stay."

So Groot came into possession of the keys. When he went out for his dinner at noon he bought a large lump of wax, and at night, when he had supped with great gusto, he amused himself by taking some very accurate impressions of the bits of steel which gave access to Laurence's workshop.

As for Laurence, hurrying home rather earlier than usual so that he might not be late at the Carlton, he came across Charity Wraye in the

street, and walked along with her. A sudden impulse prompted him to show her the anonymous letter.

"See," he said; "I've always felt that I could trust you in everything, ever since I met you at Canterbury, and I want to trust you now—at least, I mean I want to give you a confidence. May I?"

"It is good of you to feel that you can," she said. "Is it anything I can help you in?"

For answer he put the sheet of foolscap into her hands. "Read that," he said.

She read the letter through with brows slightly contracted, and eyes that looked puzzled, and then handed it back to him.

"Can you think who sent that?" he asked.

"I?" she said. "No, I cannot. But——"

"Yes?" he said, seeing her hesitate. "You have been struck by something?"

"Yes," she replied. "The paper is exactly the same as a special paper that we use in the offices. I noticed the water-mark. But ours has an engraved heading."

"Ah, and now I notice something," said Laurence. "There has been a strip cut off from this!"

"Yes, I noticed that, too," said Charity.  
"And I noticed something else."

"Yes," said Laurence, eagerly; "what is it?"

"That this has been typed on the same sort of machine that we use throughout the offices," she answered. "The whole place was equipped with them some time ago, and all the partners got some for their private houses as well."

Laurence considered matters. "Then it seems very probable that this letter was written by someone connected with the firm," he said. "Though, of course, there will be thousands of that particular type-writing machine in use, no doubt, in London alone."

"Yes," said Charity, "but I don't think any firm but ours uses this size and sort of paper. It was specially made for us—there's a tremendous stock of it in the store department."

"That seems proof positive that somebody connected with the firm did send this, then," said Laurence. "Please keep this to yourself; don't mention it to your brother—it might alarm him."

"Oh no," she said. "I—I hope you are in no danger."

"Personally? Oh, I'm not afraid of that,"



he answered, laughing. "Don't be alarmed. I shall have to hurry away now, or I shall be late."

He was conscious as he left her that she had shown some confusion when she expressed the hope that he was in no danger, and he began to question himself as to whether a feeling warmer than mere friendship was not beginning to spring up between them.

"She's a dear girl!" he murmured. "And a good one. I'd rather spend the evening with her and Dickie than go to dine with these other people."

However, an hour later he was chatting and laughing gaily to Miss Delomosne, who, for purposes of her own, quite apart from those of her host, made herself very fascinating to Laurence. But not all her blandishments, nor the entreaties of Sir Herbert, nor the worldly-wisdom advice of Sir John Bedford could stir Laurence from his determination not to spend the week-end on the river.

"After to-night," he said, "I won't leave my work night or day until it's complete. You see, I've had a warning."

And therewith he showed them the anonymous letter, carefully refraining from saying

anything as to the conclusions Charity Wraye had come to about it. Before them he made light of it, and as none of them seemed to attach any great amount of importance to it it soon dropped out as a subject of conversation, Sir Herbert having the final word in saying that he believed every inventor could show a trunk full of such documents if he had kept them.

But, later on, as they were about to separate, Sir John contrived to get Miss Delomosne to himself in a palm-shaded alcove. He spoke to her with an anger which he had kept concealed and bottled up for the past hour and a half.

"You wrote that letter!" he said. "You can't deny it."

Miss Delomosne faced him boldly. "Yes," she answered, "I did. Now you can perhaps recognise something. By sending him that letter I range myself against you, and I'll fight you to the very death, if need be. You think I'm in your power, don't you? Well, I'm not! Not, do you hear? Go home and look in your secret drawer, Sir John!"

## CHAPTER XX

Sir John Bedford went away from the Carlton that night with mixed feelings surging and wandering in his mind. Miss Delomosne had more than once been of particular service and use to him because of her position as his senior partner's ward. Now that she had openly defied him he recognised that she would prove a formidable enemy. She was capable of anything—he knew that from considerable experience of her. Moreover, she was just one of those women to whom revenge is doubly sweet, and she had cause to care a good deal for her revenge on him. The fortune of life had placed her in his power, and he had used that power as a means to his own ends. Now that she was out of his power, or believed herself to be, she would turn on him like a tigress. But—was she?

“Confound it!” he said to himself as he walked down Whitehall on his way from Pall Mall to Westminster. “There’s only one way

in which she could have regained her freedom, and that's by getting the letters. Look in my secret drawer, indeed! I'd like to see anybody get into that! And yet she spoke positively and sneeringly. There's something wrong: what is it?" Then a sudden thought struck him and brought him to a sharp pause. "By Heaven!" he said. "That scoundrel Shepheard! Can it be possible?"

He was so anxious to know the absolute truth as to his surmise that he hailed a passing hansom, and bade the driver go as fast as possible to Queen Anne's Mansions. Within a few minutes he was in his own flat, had sent the valet whom he had engaged after Shepheard's flight to bed, locked himself in his study, and thrown off his overcoat.

"Now we'll soon see," he said, and went over to a small but heavily-fashioned escritoire which stood in an alcove in one corner of the room. "If Mr. Shepheard really did make a way into this he's cleverer than I took him for—much cleverer. And I can think of no one but him."

He took off his dinner-jacket and, turning up the cuffs of his shirt, pulled the escritoire out of the alcove. Made of old Spanish mahogany

and liberally clasped and ornamented with brass-work, it was by no means easy to move, but he drew it under the nearest electric light, and unlocked the fastening of the heavy lid with a curiously-shaped key which he took from his pocket-book. Lifting some papers from the cavity within he touched a secret spring in the side. A panel slid back with a sharp click and revealed an opening. Another touch of another spring, and a drawer appeared—empty.

“She was right!” he exclaimed. “And it’s that scoundrel Shepheard. But how did he manage it? I’ll swear he never had the key.”

He began to search about the desk, endeavouring to find out by what means it had been opened. There were no marks upon it that he could detect—not a scratch disfigured the fine satiny polish of its surface. He turned up an exceptionally powerful reading lamp and examined the various joinings, and at last he saw that the *escritoire* had been entered from behind by carefully taking out a panel, which had just as carefully been replaced. Sir John locked the *escritoire* up again, restored it to its place, and put on his dinner-jacket. Going back to the dining-room he mixed himself a whisky-and-soda and lighted a cigar. With one in his hand and

the other between his lips, he walked up and down the room, thinking. Half an hour later, having finished his cigar in an easy-chair, he drank a night-cap of whisky and went to bed. According to his usual habit he dismissed the affairs of the day as soon as he bolted his bedroom door.

But Sir John's mind was wide enough awake next morning when he entered his dining-room for breakfast. From the moment he had opened his eyes his mind had been steadily and busily exercising itself as to the solution of several problems which the present situation necessitated consideration of. The newspapers of the morning lay neatly arranged on a side-table; he picked one up, and, still thinking over a plan of action, ran his eyes mechanically along the columns. Without paying any particular attention to anything they suddenly struck on a name, the sight of which made him start, just as it had made Shepherd start in that very room some days before.

"The convict, Edward Penrose, who effected his escape from Dartmoor more than a week ago, has so far successfully eluded all attempts at recapture. Although every effort has been made to ascertain his whereabouts he has com-



pletely disappeared, and the authorities believe that he is safely hidden in London, from whence he will doubtless endeavour to cross the Continent. It will be remembered that Penrose, a man of great ability and of impressive personality, was sentenced three years ago to a long term of penal servitude for forgery, the victims of his crime being the well-known engineers, Messrs. Armadale, Limited. A sad feature of the case was that Penrose was a protégé of Sir Herbert Armadale, the senior partner, and had been educated and practically adopted by that gentleman. At the time of the forgery Penrose was in full charge of the financial department of the firm. It will further be remembered that, in spite of very clear evidence against him, he vehemently protested his innocence."

Sir John read this paragraph carefully over, and threw the newspaper back amongst the rest.

"So that's why Shepherd went off so quickly!" he thought. "Well, I don't wonder. After even three years of it Penrose will have worked himself up to a sufficient pitch of anger to give Mr. Shepherd an unpleasant time if they ever do meet. I remember the look he gave him as he walked out of the dock!"

Then he breakfasted, with his usual good appetite, and at exactly half-past nine got into his motor-car. But instead of driving direct to the works he bade his man go to a certain department at Scotland Yard. Here Sir John sent in his card, with a request for an interview with a famous detective-inspector, who immediately sent down an invitation to join him in his office.

"I see," said Sir John plunging at once into the matter which had brought him there—"I see that Edward Penrose has got away from Dartmoor."

"Yes," answered the inspector; "that's so, Sir John. He's got clear away—been away nine—or perhaps ten—days."

"And they say in the papers that it's thought he's got to London and is hidden here. Is that possible?"

The inspector shrugged his shoulders, and smiled. "Possible—yes," he replied. "Quite possible, if he could get away from immediate recapture and procure clothes and money. He may have had an accomplice."

"But—why London, where he was known?" asked Sir John.

The inspector smiled more oracularly than

ever. "London is a big place, Sir John," he answered. "Of course Penrose was not a criminal of the habitual classes—if he had been he'd have made for some of the haunts we know, in the quarters we know. As it is, if he's got funds and clothes he could put up at a good hotel with impunity, and from there make his way to the Continent."

"But surely he'd be recognised here?"

"Might be—might be! It's a sporting chance. So far as I remember him, he'd the barrister, or doctor, or actor type of face—clean-shaven," said the inspector. "Well dressed and groomed, he might pass a few days in London easily enough. It's a question of his means."

"You remember all the circumstances of the case?" said Sir John.

"Oh yes, very well," replied the inspector.

"Especially the evidence of Shephard?" asked Sir John.

"Oh! of course. That nettled Penrose altogether," answered the inspector. "Let me see, wasn't Shephard a sort of servant to him?"

"No," replied Sir John. "Shephard was employed as a species of messenger, footman,

run-about-man in our offices. Penrose used his services a good deal. Shephard had been an under-footman at Sir Herbert Armadale's. Well, I took Shephard into my employ soon after the Penrose affair—he was, I could see, sharp, keen, alert, and I wanted such a man."

"I see."

"Nine days ago," continued Sir John, "Shephard disappeared from my flat with most amazing suddenness. I was quite at a loss to account for it, for he was not only a model servant, but evidently well pleased with his work and place. Went off like a shot! I left him in the flat one evening when I went out to my club, and never saw him again."

"Nine days ago," mused the inspector. "Ah, I understand. He'd heard of Penrose's escape. Do you want him back, Sir John? Did he take anything?"

"He didn't take anything with him," replied Sir John, "and it wasn't until last night that I found that he'd abstracted some papers of mine. However, I know where they got to, and I might as well cry for the moon as try to get them back. But you might as well have Shephard's description. I've a good idea that he's in France, where he'll probably be found running a small

hotel or restaurant in company with a French-woman whom he knew here."

Then, having described Mr. Shepheard and Mademoiselle Leonie, Sir John descended to his motor-car. Instead of going towards the south-east he made his man turn to the south-west, and bade him drive to Eaton Square.

At Sir Herbert Armadale's house he asked for Miss Delomosne. She was in no wise surprised to receive his message, for she had felt sure ever since the previous night that he would not be long before he called on her. She went down and found him in the morning-room. No greeting passed between them; she merely entered the room, closed the door, and faced him.

"Well?" she said, not without some trace of bitterness and contempt in her voice.

Sir John slowly drew off his gloves. "Look here, Lilian"—he began.

Miss Delomosne stopped him with a frown and a gesture. "No!" she said. "Say what you have to say, and say it as plainly as you like; but don't use my name."

"There was a time when you didn't mind my using it," he said, with a sneer. "However, a mere name's nothing. I want to know what you're going to do."

"Do?"

"Don't let's beat about the bush. You wrote that anonymous letter to Workman?"

"Well, supposing I did?"

"I know you did. Nobody else could have done. Nobody else knew. Now then, as you know so much you shall know more. There are four of us in at this—prime movers, at any rate, with two or three cat's-paws who can be paid—and we mean to have that secret of Workman's one way or the other. Now, you're not rich beyond the dreams of avarice, Lilian—oh, very well, it merely slipped out—and I can assure you that Sir Herbert is by no means as well off as he was. The firm's done badly these last few years. He'll not leave you what he could have done some years ago. And as——"

"What do you wish to say to me?" she demanded.

"I wish to say—come in with us at this; come in, and have your share."

Miss Delomosne regarded him steadily for a full minute. "Who are you—who are the four?" she inquired.

Sir John frowned at this question. "Oh, well," he said, "'in for a penny, in for a pound,' I suppose now. Well, there's myself; there's



Francis Armadale—the original idea came from him, because he's in awfully low water through gambling, and he knows there's a perfect gold mine in this young Workman; then there's Paul Sabatier, a famous French scientist and inventor; and Monsieur Bremond."

"What—a clergyman—a priest?" she exclaimed.

"Bah! Bremond is no more clergyman or priest than I am," said Sir John. "He's a Belgian speculator, and it suits him and us that he dresses in that way when he comes here—that's all."

"Let me see," she said. "I think you first introduced M. Bremond to Sir Herbert."

"Of course I did—who else?" he answered.

She still continued to regard him steadily. "An estimable galère!" she said. "Well, and what is my part to be?"

Sir John sat down on the edge of the table and folded his hands across his knees. "There's no doubt," he said, thoughtfully, "that you can exercise a tremendous influence on young Workman. It's my belief he's in love with you; if he isn't, you can make him so. I was watching him last night—it only needs opportunity. Now, why can't you persuade him that,

after all, there's great risks about inventions, and that although he may fancy he's going to get a colossal fortune out of this it may be a fiasco. Persuade him that it would be much better to dispose of it to a company who would give him a handsome price for it. Tell him of the fate of heaps of inventors who thought they were going to be as rich as Dives, and died as poor as Lazarus. Tell him that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and that a hundred thousand in good hard cash is worth lots more than hypothetical millions. Tell him—but you're clever enough to know how to get round a man."

"I'm clever enough," she said, "to know that I should be a fool if I acceded to your proposal. My answer is—No!"

Sir John picked up his gloves and began to fit them on. "You rely on your recovery of your letters?" he said.

"I rely on the fact that I am no longer in your power," she said.

Sir John picked up his hat and gazed on its glossiness. "Oh!" he said. "Well, I'm not quite sure as to that yet. There's a little news in the papers this morning which may interest you. See here."

He picked up a newspaper, and, after turning it over a little, pointed to a paragraph similar to that which he had read before breakfast. He watched her as she read it, and saw her face turn pale and her lips compress themselves.

"Not pleasant news, is it?" he said meaningly.

Miss Delomosne made a weary gesture in laying the paper down. "I don't care," she said. "I'm tired of all of it. I gave you my confidence and asked your help, and you have treated me abominably and most cruelly. Come what may, I've resolved I will not be your cat's-paw again. That is my last word."

With that she turned away and left him.

## CHAPTER XXI

When he left Eaton Square Sir John decided that it was high time to drive straight to the works ; it was his usual practice to arrive there at ten o'clock, and he was already nearly an hour late. All the way there he was thinking of the interview which had just ended, and his active, scheming brain was canvassing various chances which seemed to arise out of it. Chief and foremost was the chance of Miss Delomosne telling Laurence Workman of the facts now in her possession.

"But it's my impression she'll not," he decided. "For one thing this news about Penrose will keep her occupied for a while, and very quiet ; for another, she'll hesitate before doing anything that will bother Sir Herbert. If only Sabatier would hasten and get the thing across to Berlin we might be first. I'll wire him again this morning, and Bremond too. Here's Workman making all speed and we're doing nothing."

However, when he reached the works he found

that some progress had been made with at least one of his numerous plannings and contrivings. The porter at the gates handed him a small package, which appeared from the feel and shape of it to contain a cardboard box wrapped securely in stout cartridge paper and heavily sealed. This was addressed to Sir John Bedford and marked "Private," and the handwriting was unfamiliar to its recipient. But he saw at once that it had been written by a foreigner; presumably, from the shape of certain letters, by a German.

Sir John carried the package up to his own private room, and placed it in a drawer while he occupied himself with his secretary and his letters. When the secretary had gone away and left him alone he took out the package, and, breaking the seals, cut the enveloping string. Within the paper was an oblong cigarette-box, and in the cigarette-box, carefully folded in tissue paper, lay two carefully-moulded impressions, in wax, of two keys.

"Groot's work," said Sir John, examining the moulds narrowly, but without touching them. "And excellent work, too. I'll have these put in hand at once—in fact, I'll take them myself when I've had a look round."

Then, with one of those small inattentions to detail which even the most scrupulous builders up of schemes and plans sometimes make, he left the wax moulds lying on his desk and went off to go round the offices and the yards. He looked in at various departments in the former, and finally turned into Sir Herbert Armadale's rooms, entering the ante-office where the senior partner's secretary and Charity were at work.

"Sir Herbert here yet?" he asked of the secretary.

"No, Sir John, and he's not coming. Miss Delomosne has just telephoned to say that he's not at all well this morning, and doesn't think he will be fit to come out to-day," replied the secretary.

"Ah, I know he's got that old heart trouble again," said Sir John, carelessly. "However, there's nothing just now to demand his attention. I shall be here all day if you want me."

The secretary picked up some documents. "While you're here, Sir John, I wish you'd look at these letters and tell me what to reply to them," he said. "They're none of them difficult, but I should like your approval of what I intend to say."



Sir John took the papers and sat down to discuss them. Most of them were easily dismissed, but one gave him some occasion for thought.

"Ah, I've got something about this in my own room," he said. "Let Miss Wraye fetch it. If you go to my room and look on my desk," he said, turning to Charity, "you'll see a letter under a brass paper-weight. It's the only one beneath it. I meant to bring it round with me."

Then he went on discussing the remaining letters and dictating a sentence of alteration here and there.

Charity went round to Sir John's office and looked for the paper. He was a man of great method and orderliness, and she easily found what she had been sent for. As she stood there she saw the wax moulds, and wondering what they were, stooped over them for a moment. Then, paying no further heed to them, she took the letter and went back to the secretary's room. An hour later Sir John came back to his room, wrapped up the moulds, put the box in his pocket, and went away to a certain locksmith's that he knew of. When he came to the works next morning the porter handed him another

package which contained two finished keys, together with the moulds. Sir John threw the moulds into the fire, and placed the keys in his private safe.

That day, about the beginning of the afternoon, Laurence was eating a chop in his rough-and-ready office, and between mouthfuls dictating letters to Dickie Wraye, who sat at a high desk in an attitude of true clerkly importance. Everything in the workshop was quiet, for Groot had gone to dine and to smoke, and the usual tapping of hammers had ceased in his absence. Suddenly a loud knocking was heard on the smaller of the two doors which gave admittance to the building—a knocking urgent and insistent and immediately repeated. Dickie Wraye started, and Laurence paused in the act of eating.

“Who can that be?” he said.

For they had never had a visitor to the workshop, and there was a notice outside saying that no one could be admitted on any pretext.

Laurence rose slowly when the knock was repeated the third time, and drawing a key from his pocket opened the door a little way and looked out. There stood a policeman, who

had evidently come from somewhere or other in a great hurry.

"Mr. Workman?" he said, glancing at a scrap of paper.

"Yes," answered Laurence.

"There's a man been seriously injured in Atlas Street, sir," he said. "Seems to be a German by his appearance. We found your address on him—a big man, with a flaxen moustache."

"Yes," said Laurence. "That's my man, Herman Groot. Is he very badly hurt?"

The policeman coughed. "Pretty bad, I'm afraid, sir. Crossing the street, stepped out of the way of one tramcar, and was knocked down by another. Quite unconscious, sir."

"Where is he?" asked Laurence.

"Taken him on the ambulance to hospital, sir," answered the policeman.

Laurence bade him wait outside a moment, and went back to Dickie Wraye. "There's been an accident to Groot, Dickie, a bad accident, I'm afraid," he said, sorrowfully. "They've taken him to the hospital, and I must go to him. Do you mind if I lock you in? I'll get back as soon as I can."

"Oh no, sir; no, Mr. Workman," answered

Dickie. "I shall be all right. I hope it's nothing very bad, sir?"

"I'm afraid it is," said Laurence, who was hurrying into his coat. "He's unconscious, at any rate. I'll hope not to be long, Dickie."

He went outside, locked the door, and set off with the policeman across the yard. And at the gates he encountered Sir John Bedford, who was just driving in in his motor-car. Sir John stared at Laurence and his companion with surprise.

"Hello, Workman!" he exclaimed. "Anything wrong?"

"My man Groot has had an accident," said Laurence. "I'm afraid it's a very serious one. I'm going to the hospital."

"Dear, dear!" said Sir John. "Let me know what it is when you get back. Which hospital is it?"

"St. Malachi's sir," answered the policeman, naming a famous institution a mile away.

"Then, here, take the motor," said Sir John, jumping out. "You'll be there in a few minutes."

Laurence thanked him, and got into the car with the policeman. In another second or two they were off. Then Sir John, after standing a

moment as if in deep thought, walked across the yard to the main block of buildings, went up to his private room, and after some further cogitation took from his safe the two keys which he had received that morning, and set off by a devious route to the workshop in the little-frequented corner.

Now, it so chanced that the only room in the main building from which the side door in Laurence's workshop could be seen was one which the girl-clerks and typists at Armadales'—of whom there was a goodly number—used as a cloak-room. It also chanced that just when Sir John Bedford approached that door Charity Wraye was standing near the window of that room, divesting herself of her hat and jacket after her return from lunch. She saw him go up to the door, insert the key, and enter, and a great feeling of fear fell upon her, for she knew how jealously guarded the workshop was; that only Laurence possessed the keys; that no one but Groot and Dickie had ever entered, and that there would presently come a time when they would be rigorously excluded. Why, then, did Sir John Bedford enter?

She waited. At last, when ten or fifteen minutes had passed, he came out, and disap-

peared around an adjacent shed. Then she went back to her work, and it suddenly flashed upon her what the meaning of the wax moulds was which she had seen on Sir John Bedford's desk the previous day. The feeling of fear changed to one of sickening terror. For she already knew that her liking for Laurence Workman was more than mere or passing fancy, but something deep and lasting, and it seemed to her that she was in the position of one chained hand and foot, who must needs look on in impotent helplessness while something very near and dear is wronged.

She went home early that night and found Dickie sitting in a dejected attitude in the window, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands. He had made no preparations for supper, and when he looked up on her entrance she saw that he knew what had happened. Charity went straight to the point.

"Dickie, were you in that workshop when Sir John went in?"

Dickie nodded miserably.

"You were? Did he see you?"

"No—I hid. First behind the door, then under Mr. Workman's camp-bed."

"What did he do?"



"Walked all round the framework of the aeroplane, examined it, then pulled a pocket-camera out and took two or three snap-shots of it."

Charity drew a long breath. "Then you were alone, Dickie?"

Dickie nodded.

"How was that? Where was Groot?"

"Groot met with an accident and was taken to the hospital, and Mr. Workman went to see him. He locked me in."

"Dickie—did you tell Mr. Workman when he returned?"

Again Dickie shook his head, more miserably than ever.

"Why not?"

"I was afraid, Charity."

"You were afraid? Afraid of what?"

"I was afraid that if I told him, and Sir John found out that I had, he would have you turned away from the office," said Dickie.

Charity put her arm round his neck and kissed him. "Whatever it costs, Dickie, he must be told," she said. "You mustn't flinch. He must know! Sir John's a bad, a hateful man—it's he who's trying to rob Mr. Workman of his secrets. We must tell Mr. Workman at once—this very night. But how shall we get

at him if he's locked up in the workshop? They won't let us into the yard now."

"He won't be in the workshop to-night," answered Dickie. "He locked it up, and came away with me. He's awfully depressed—he says he can't get on for a few days without Groot or some other man, and that as there's nothing that's really important in the workshop at present he won't stay the night there. He's gone home, so as to be nearer the hospital. He expects to be sent for to Groot again any time; the doctors think he'll die."

"Very well, then," said Charity, "we will have some tea and then go round to Mr. Workman's, both of us. He must not be kept in ignorance any longer—he must know."

But neither sister nor brother could eat or drink much, and before long they were on their way to Laurence's rooms. His landlady appeared to be out, and a small child who answered the door could give them no more information when they asked for Mr. Workman than to keep silence and point up the stairs. Charity bade Dickie follow her, and went up, and in her impatience gave one hasty tap at the door and walked in, to find herself confronted by Miss Delomosne.

## CHAPTER XXII

When Sir John Bedford left Miss Delomosne in Eaton Square she found herself faced by a question which life puts to some of us a good many times, to others of us seldom, but to all of us at least once: What to do next? There are some of us who answer that question easily and readily; others of us who find it difficult to answer. Miss Delomosne, at this juncture, felt herself to be one of the latter class, and, after some thought, she took refuge in a proposal to do what everybody else of that class does—that is, to seek counsel of somebody wiser and stronger than herself. And, being a woman, she naturally turned to a man for counsel, and the man she instinctively selected for the rôle of father-confessor was the man to whom she herself wanted to give advice.

Miss Delomosne had been curiously interested in Laurence Workman from the moment of their meeting on board the *Princess Elizabeth*. He seemed to her to represent a type of man of

whom she had known little. His very faults—which only amounted to a certain outspokenness, and perhaps too much candour—commended him to her, because she had, by some strange whim of fortune, lived from childhood in a certain atmosphere of trickery and deceit. Then, again, his sublime self-confidence, the way in which he insisted upon himself, the fashion in which he laughed away obstacles—all these things appealed to her more strongly than she herself imagined. And she was now resolved to do all that lay in her power to save him from the machinations of Sir John Bedford, of whose nature and character she herself was only too well aware.

With a woman of Miss Delomosne's temperament immediate action always follows resolution. She knew Laurence's address, and determined to go to him that very evening, taking her chance of finding him there or not. Sir Herbert Armadale, when in town, invariably went to his club in the afternoon, and very often dined there—he had mentioned at lunch that day that he intended to follow this course that night, and Miss Delomosne accordingly made her own plans. At six o'clock, very quietly dressed, and wearing a thick veil, she left the

house, and presently finding a taxi-cab, was carried away to the dismal region in which Armadales, Limited, reared its roofs and chimneys. On her way down she suddenly encountered Sir John Bedford's motor-car. That worthy gentleman glanced at the occupant of the taxi-cab, and showed no sign of recognition. It seemed to Miss Delomosne that he looked pre-occupied and careworn, and she wondered if the afternoon had brought any further developments in his machinations.

Laurence had reached his lodgings before Miss Delomosne arrived, and was in a state of considerable depression. The accident to Groot had upset all his calculations; he knew of another workman whom he could have brought over from Germany, but in whom he could not place the trust and confidence, either as workman or man, which he had placed in Groot. Then, again, there was the mystery of the anonymous letter still troubling him; he had put it from him as far as he could, but, in spite of himself, he could not help thinking about it. He had never known what it was to harbour or encourage gloomy feelings, but he certainly felt just then that there was some conspiracy of fate against him. He was like a man who walks

through a wood, and feels, rather than knows, that it is full of unseen and malignant enemies.

His landlady brought him up some tea, and counselled him to drink it while it was fresh-made and hot. Laurence scarcely heard her, and he sat staring at the tea-tray, without attempting to touch its contents, for some minutes after she had gone. Presently she came upstairs again, tapped at his door, and looked in.

"There's a lady would like to see you, sir," she said.

Laurence stared at her. "A lady to see me?" he exclaimed.

"A tallish lady—in a veil, sir."

"Then bring her up," he said.

His first thoughts turned immediately to Charity Wraye—there could be no one else. Surely—surely nothing else had gone wrong on this most unlucky day! Surely there was nothing the matter with Dickie?

Then the door opened again, and he found himself face to face with Miss Delomosne.

Laurence was quick to rise to the occasion, mindful of the fact that his landlady was still within the room. He welcomed his visitor quietly, and bade the landlady bring another cup.



"You must be very much surprised to see me here, Mr. Workman," said Miss Delomosne, as she took the chair which Laurence drew forward for her.

"So many strange things are happening just now, Miss Delomosne," he replied, "that I am almost forgetting how to feel surprised. I am very glad to see you here, and I hope you will let me give you a cup of tea. I'm afraid," he went on, as the landlady returned with a cup and saucer—"I'm afraid I've nothing much to offer you, but perhaps——"

"Please, I only want a cup of tea," she said. She waited until Laurence had handed her the cup and the landlady had gone, and then she continued: "Mr. Workman, I came to see you because I felt that I must."

"Yes?" he said.

"You are quite right in saying that strange things are happening just now," she went on. "I am sorry to be concerned in them, but I am. It was I who wrote the anonymous letter which you showed us at the Carlton last night."

Very much to her surprise Laurence did not seem to receive this announcement with any great amount of wonder. He had poured out a cup of tea for himself, and sat by the table

slowly sipping it, and he merely nodded his head on hearing her confession.

"Yes," he said; "I knew that someone either employed by the firm or connected with some member of the firm had written the letter."

"You did! Why?" she asked.

"Because the paper on which it is typed was some specially manufactured for the firm, and the typewriter also is of a make exclusively used by the firm and its members," he answered.

Miss Delomosne gazed at him wonderingly.

"That was clever of you," she said.

"Not at all—the two facts were pointed out to me by a friend," he replied.

"Who is evidently well acquainted with the inner workings of Armadales, Limited, then," she said.

"Just so," said Laurence.

Miss Delomosne trifled with her tea-spoon; at last she looked up at him. "You must wonder why I sent you that anonymous letter?" she said.

"No," he replied, "I don't, because I am sure you sent it meaning to do me a service. But——"

"Well?" she said, seeing him hesitate

because of some thought which he did not seem to care to put into words.

"Why not have told me of this yourself, instead of sending me that letter?" he asked.

"Ah!" she replied. "Perhaps I should have done so. Now—have you any idea as to the identity of the people who are trying to rob you, cheat you?"

Laurence shook his head. "So far—none," he answered.

"Then, whatever it may cost me, I am going to tell you," she said. "I can't rest until you know. The——"

"Stop!" he said. "You say 'whatever it costs me.' Am I to understand that there might be personal danger to yourself—personal danger, mind!—in your telling me what you evidently know?"

"It is possible that there might be," she replied.

Laurence rose and began to pace the room. "Then don't tell me, please," he said. "If——"

"No," she said, interrupting him with a peremptory motion of her hand. "That's no use. I must tell you! If you don't let me tell you I shall tell somebody else—the police, I suppose."

Laurence watched her in silence for a full minute.

"Very well," he said.

Miss Delomosne handed him her cup. She folded her hands on her knee, and something very hard and determined came into her face.

"You must have wondered who your enemies were," she said; "yet you say you have no idea of their identity. Well, then, first and foremost, Sir John Bedford."

Laurence made no sign. He stood leaning against the table, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his trousers, watching his visitor intently.

"And with him Francis Armadale——"

"What?" Laurence exclaimed. "No!"

"I tell you the truth," she said. "It was he who initiated the whole plot. He knew what you were attempting, and estimated its worth."

"Go on," said Laurence.

"And M. Bremond."

Laurence laughed, almost incredulously. "Oh, I say!" he exclaimed. "Why, he is a priest!"

"No," she said. "He is a most unscrupulous Belgian speculator and financial agent—money-lender, in fact—who passes himself off as an ecclesiastic on occasions."

Laurence stared at her as if he could scarcely believe his own ears.

"Anyone else?" he asked.

"Yes—the Frenchman, Paul Sabatier."

Laurence gave vent to his feelings in a sharp whistle. "Ah!" he said. "Now I see daylight. Sabatier! That, then, was why they stole my last lot of papers! They thought that Sabatier would be able to deduce my secret from them. I see—I see! How diabolically clever. Sabatier, indeed! Why, Paul Sabatier is the most ingenious chemist and chemical engineer in Europe. Tell me—tell me," he exclaimed; "what do they intend—what are they doing?"

"They want to sell the—whatever it is—to the German Government," she replied.

"And they—are they—is Sabatier at work on my papers? Has he found the secret, the formula?" he demanded.

Miss Delomosne shook her head. "I don't know," she answered.

Laurence smote the palms of his hands together. "And your part?" he said, suddenly turning on her. "What were you to do? You must have been privy to this for some time—perhaps from the beginning? Ah! I see it now.

I met you on the Ostend boat—perhaps you were tracking me then. And Bremond—he, too, was there! Why don't you tell me? Tell me—all. Sabatier in possession of my papers! Why, I may be ruined. Who would believe me against Sabatier?"

He was now so agitated that Miss Delomosne rose and laid her hand pleadingly on his arm.

"Mr. Workman," she said, earnestly, "believe me, I didn't know everything—everything, until this morning. I knew a little. Believe me again—I've come to you as soon as I could, and I hope and think I'm not too late."

Laurence stared at her as if he could scarcely believe anything that anybody ever told him again.

"Why do you think you're not too late?" he demanded.

"Because Sir John Bedford tried to induce me this morning to persuade you to let him and his friends come in with you," she answered. "That shows that so far, at any rate, Sabatier has not succeeded."

Laurence, who had dropped into a chair, and was impatiently beating the hearthrug with his



right foot, stared at her again with a sharply questioning gaze.

"What made you come and tell me in the end?" he said. "Pardon me if I seem suspicious, or speak rudely or strongly, but I'm being cruelly wronged, and I don't understand—I don't understand!" he broke out, bringing his fist heavily down upon his knee. "You've evidently been in their confidence for at any rate some of the time: what's made you break it in the end? I want to know."

If he had not been so excited, so carried away by his indignation, he would have seen that Miss Delomosne became very pale, and that her fingers tightened upon each other.

"Mr. Workman," she said, "I could not tell you of this until now, or, at any rate, until recently, because I was in Sir John Bedford's power."

"You? In his power?"

"Yes," she answered. "Let me tell you about it. John Bedford is a thoroughly bad man—a scoundrel. He had me in his power, and he abused his power."

Laurence gazed at her wonderingly and miserably. "I'm very sorry," he said.

"This is how it came about," she said. "My father was Sir Herbert Armadale's dearest friend, and when he died he confided me to Sir Herbert, who is also my legal guardian, and of whom I am very fond. When I was eighteen John Bedford wanted to marry me, and was continually urging himself upon me. I did not like him in any way, and steadily refused him. The truth was, Mr. Workman, I was in love—a young and foolish girl's love—with a man named Edward Penrose, who was, to all intents and purposes, the adopted son of Sir Herbert, had been educated by him, and was always with us in Eaton Square or at Hurstdene Manor, though he did not live with us. He was a very handsome and fascinating man, and I, as I say, was only eighteen. He exercised a terrible influence over me, and I was quite dominated by him at the time I found out that he had been leading a double life, and was married to a woman who was then a hopeless inebriate. He persuaded me eventually to elope with him to South America, and I was about to do so when he was suddenly arrested for forgery and sent to prison for a long period. That discovery nearly killed Sir Herbert—and it killed my foolish infatuation. But the man

had letters of mine in his possession, and they fell into Sir John's hands, and he has held them over me ever since, because he knew what my guardian would feel if he knew of my secret about Edward Penrose. Lately, those letters have come into my hands, and I have destroyed them, so I fear John Bedford no longer. Now, Mr. Workman, do you understand why I did not speak before, and why I tell you that the man you have chiefly to deal with is a thorough scoundrel?"

Laurence, who had listened to this story with utter amazement, jumped to his feet, and stretched his arms, as if he meant to plunge into action.

"Yes, indeed," he said, "he is a scoundrel, and I am glad—very glad—you're out of his hands. And thank you for coming to tell me. I shall beat them yet, unless Sabatier has already forestalled me. Sabatier! Ah! that's the difficulty. If only—Miss Delomosne, will you wait here while I run to the telegraph-office? I have an idea—a fine idea! Ring for more tea—please be at home. I will run there and back; it's not far."

Therewith, snatching up his hat, Laurence darted out of the room and downstairs, leaving

Miss Delomosne somewhat tearful and tremulous after her confession. It was very soon after this that Charity and Dickie Wraye came in and found her alone.

## CHAPTER XXIII

When people who are strangers to each other chance to meet in the rooms of a mutual friend who does not happen to be there to perform any ceremonies of introduction they are apt to commence a series of speculations as to each other's identity and precise relationship to the absent one. Some such process immediately began in the mind of Miss Delomosne as soon as Charity and Dickie Wraye entered Laurence's room. She was quite unaware as to who they were. That they must be intimate friends she felt sure, seeing that they had entered unannounced. She took in the healthy charm of Charity's personality with quick feminine subtlety, and she felt an involuntary and irrepressible pang of something not far removed, had she cared to analyse it, from jealousy. Who was this very good-looking young woman who came so freely into Laurence Workman's parlour? A sudden intuition flashed upon her: could this be the girl he had mentioned at

Canterbury—the girl whom he had wished to bring to lunch, and who had pleaded a headache? Something told her that her surmise was correct, and the feeling that was half-curiosity, half-jealousy, deepened.

As for Charity, she had recognised Miss Delomosne at once—not as Miss Delomosne, but as the lady with whom she had seen Laurence walking in the old cathedral city some weeks earlier. Quietly and unobtrusively as Miss Delomosne was dressed on this occasion, she was handsomer than ever. Her recent conversation with Laurence had brought colour to her cheek and light to her eye, and Charity recognised her for a beautiful woman and a woman of culture and power; and just as Miss Delomosne wondered what she was doing there, so she wondered why Miss Delomosne should be discovered in Laurence's sitting-room. She saw the two tea-cups on the table; they had evidently been having tea together, then? Well, why not? And yet, bravely as Charity always strove to repress any feeling of which she did not approve, she could not help a sense of something which she would not have dared to put into words for a king's ransom.

As for Dickie, he stared at Miss Delomosne



with all his eyes. Charity, having advanced a step or two into the room and seen that it was occupied, was for beating a retreat, but Dickie held his ground and gazed at the occupant.

"He isn't here, Charity," he said. "He must be out."

Miss Delomosne transferred her attention from Charity to Dickie. "Mr. Workman has gone round to a telegraph office," she said. "He said that he would only be a few minutes. Won't you sit down?"

To Charity this simple invitation seemed to imply some sort of proprietorship in Laurence and his belongings. She felt as if she could not sit down there—Miss Delomosne had eyes that seemed to go through one.

"Thank you," she said, "but my brother and I have some news for Mr. Workman which we must give him at once. I know where the nearest telegraph office is; we will go and meet him."

She made a formal inclination of her head, and drew Dickie out of the room after her.

"Who's that, Charity?" asked Dickie, as they descended the stairs.

"I don't know, Dickie," she answered,

"but I believe it is Sir Herbert's ward, Miss Delomosne."

"Very likely come to hear how Groot is," said Dickie. "She—here's Mr. Workman."

Laurence at that moment came bursting through the door. Having been as far as the corner of the square another idea had struck him, and he had darted back to discuss it with Miss Delomosne. At sight of the sister and brother he bounded up the stairs. Charity noticed his obvious excitement.

"You have come to see me!" he exclaimed. "Yes—and you have some news? I see it—come upstairs again. I am sorry I was out. I see you have news of something."

"Yes," said Charity. "But," she went on, hesitatingly, "you—there is a lady in your sitting-room."

Laurence impatiently motioned them upstairs. "Yes—yes," he said. "But it is only Miss Delomosne. Come upstairs; you can tell me what it is there—she will not mind."

This, to Charity's mind, argued more proprietorship on Miss Delomosne's part. Instead of going back to the sitting-room she remained where she was.

"You do not know what it is that Dickie and I have to tell you," she said. "We wish to speak to you privately about Sir John Bedford."

Laurence again motioned them to remount the stairs. "Yes, yes, of course!" he exclaimed. "That's just what I expected. That's just what Miss Delomosne came to tell me about. Let us go upstairs—I should like her to hear what you have to say. Go up—go up!"

This time there was no denying Laurence's impelling persistence—he literally forced the sister and brother up before him and shepherded them into his room.

"Miss Delomosne," he said, "these are two very dear friends of mine—Charity and Dickie Wraye. They have come to tell me something about this man Bedford, just as you came. Have no fear, my friends; speak out—you can scarcely tell me anything worse than I know, or that will surprise me more than what I have already heard."

"Tell Mr. Workman what you saw this afternoon, Dickie," said Charity.

Dickie told his story briefly and clearly; Charity corroborated it with her account of what she had seen from the cloak-room window.

Laurence, either biting his lips or pulling fiercely at his moustache, listened to both in silence, occasionally exchanging a significant glance with Miss Delomosne.

"But the keys—the keys!" he exclaimed at last. "No one had the keys but myself."

Charity told him then of what she had seen on Sir John Bedford's desk that morning. Laurence listened to her with eyes full of amazement. And suddenly his face became illumined with the realisation of a truth—bitter and repulsive, but a truth.

"Good Heavens!" he burst out, striking the fist of one hand into the palm of the other. "That's Groot! I left the keys with him for one night—the night I dined with that villain at the Carlton. Groot! The very man I trusted above everybody—the man who'd worked at my side for nearly three years—the man who knew pretty nearly everything about my work—everything but the supreme secret—Groot! I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't been forced to—forced to!"

He stamped up and down the room for some minutes with such anger depicted in every movement that none of them dared to speak to him. Suddenly he began to laugh.

"And here I've been all the afternoon expending any amount of sorrows and regrets and sympathies over a man who tried to rob me!" he exclaimed, bitterly. "I didn't tell you, Miss Delomosne, that Groot met with a very serious accident to-day, and that he is lying unconscious at the hospital. Some people would say it was a judgment on him!"

"I am sorry to hear it," said Miss Delomosne. "He might have been very useful to you at this juncture."

"Useful?"

"Certainly. Because, since Groot is the only mechanic you have ever employed regularly, Groot must have sold his knowledge of what you were doing in the first place," she answered.

"I remember that Groot was given to me by Francis Armadale," said Laurence, slowly. "I had asked Francis Armadale for such a man, and he strongly recommended him—chose him for me, in fact."

"Placed him with you to serve the ends of himself and his fellow-conspirators," she said. "Now, Mr. Workman, what are you going to do?"

Laurence again began pacing up and down the room.

"What I'm afraid of," he said at last—"what I'm really afraid of is Sabatier's skill. I have, of course, heard a tremendous lot of him, and I know a little of his personal work. If Sabatier has fathomed my secret from what he knows of my papers I do not know what I shall do, because he will in all probability have immediately communicated his intelligence, provisionally, to the government to which he wishes to sell it."

"I do not think so," said Miss Delomosne. "As I said this evening, I don't think Sabatier has succeeded, up to now, because, if he had, Sir John wouldn't have wanted to buy you."

"Ah, yes!" said Laurence. "But, you see, I don't trust Sabatier. If he'll join in a plot to rob me, he'll rob his fellow-conspirators. Sabatier holds the key of the situation—they can do nothing without him. They know nothing—none of them, unless it's Bremond—and you say he's a mere financier. It's Sabatier—Sabatier that I'm afraid of!"

"Mr. Workman, sir," said Dickie, "why can't you get your machine finished first? I think I could do what Groot's done, sir."

Laurence gave the boy an affectionate pat on the shoulder. "I know you would do your



best, Dickie," he said. "But even if Groot had not met with an accident, or if he and I had worked night and day, we couldn't have finished for a week yet, and I don't know what Sabatier may not be doing. He may have had a machine already fitted to which all that was necessary was to apply my principle, when he had once discovered it—and then . . . No!" he broke off suddenly and passionately, "I'm all in the dark, and I can't do anything. I thought at first of arresting Bedford for being concerned in the theft of my papers, but how am I going to prove it? I haven't a shred of evidence except your word, Miss Delomosne, and you never saw the papers."

"No," she said, "I never saw them, and he would deny that he had ever mentioned them to me."

"And still there's Sabatier!" exclaimed Laurence. "Ah! if only——"

At that moment the landlady came upstairs with a telegram, which Laurence at once opened. He read the message and threw the flimsy paper aside.

"Groot's dead," he said. "Died without recovering consciousness. I can't feel sorry just now. He worked well for me, though, and I

must attend to his funeral. And to-night I can't think of anything—I'm weary."

Charity rose and motioned to her brother. "Come, Dickie," she said; "we must go."

"And I too," said Miss Delomosne.

Laurence went downstairs with them and said good night to all three in such an absent-minded fashion that they saw he was thinking earnestly about something else. He asked Dickie to meet him in the morning at the usual time, and then, without another word, turned into his lodgings again, quite forgetting to ask Miss Delomosne if he could get her a cab. The brother and sister went in one direction; she went in another, after receiving some instructions from Charity. And as she moved out of the square a man emerged from the shadow of the trees which stood in its centre, and followed her at a little distance.

## CHAPTER XXIV

Before Miss Delomosne had reached that end of the square which she must pass through in order to reach one of the main roads that transect that part of London she suddenly turned, and began to retrace her steps so rapidly that the man who was following her some ten or twelve yards behind was obliged to dodge into a convenient side-passage in order to avoid meeting her face to face beneath a gas lamp. She increased her pace as she went back by the way she had come ; and the man, emerging from his temporary retreat, had to hurry in order to keep her in sight. Presently she began to run, and, passing the house from which she had just emerged, she ran on until, at the further side of the square, she caught sight of Charity and Dickie Wraye. When within a few yards of them she called " Miss Wraye ! " and the brother and sister turned, and, recognising her, came slowly back. Seeing them meet, the man in pursuit stopped, looked about him as if he were seeking some particular house, and finally turned

round and sauntered back a little way. When he turned round again the two women and the crippled boy were walking slowly away in the opposite direction. Then the man followed once more, watching them.

Charity and Dickie were round-eyed with surprise to see Miss Delomosne running after them. They looked their astonishment.

"I—I want to speak to you both," she said, getting her breath. "An idea has occurred to me—I am sure you can help. Couldn't we—is there anywhere where we can talk?"

"We will go up to our rooms," said Charity, who felt that this woman had something important to propose, and was both anxious and curious to hear what it was. "They are close by, Miss Delomosne, but you will have to climb some stairs."

Dickie hastened forward to light the lamp. By the time his sister and their unexpected visitor arrived he had drawn the blinds and made the sitting-room what he considered properly prepared for guests, by placing the two easy-chairs one on each side of the hearth. He invited Miss Delomosne to occupy one of these with a polite bow.

"Thank you," said Miss Delomosne, giving

him one of her brilliant smiles. "Now, you will wonder why I ran back. But I felt that you are both deeply interested in Mr. Workman and his success, and that you have some influence over him."

Charity shook her head. "I don't think that we have any right to say that, Miss Delomosne," she said. "Mr. Workman is very kind to my brother, but——"

"You have, Charity," said Dickie, bluntly. "Mr. Workman always listens to anything you have to say."

"Well, this is what I feel," said Miss Delomosne, charitably avoiding any notice of Dickie's last remark. "Whatever he may think, Mr. Workman and his success are in danger—great danger—so long as he remains working in that place at Armadales'. He must be induced to leave it—at once."

"But there's the—the machine, ma'am!" exclaimed Dickie.

"He must remove it," said Miss Delomosne. "I gather you have seen it. Is it something very massive?"

"No, ma'am—it's something very light," answered Dickie. "It's—but then I ought not to speak of it."

"Nor need you, except in general terms. Could it be moved on, say, an ordinary dray or trolley?" asked Miss Delomosne.

"Oh yes, ma'am—it's nothing but a framework of light wood, thin steel, and silk," replied Dickie. "I—why, I believe I could lift it!"

"Well then, Mr. Workman can easily get it away—at once," said Miss Delomosne. "To tell you the truth, Miss Wraye, now that Sir John Bedford has keys of that workshop, whatever is in it is not safe. Now, I gather that you know this district; can't you think of somewhere, of someone, where or with whom Mr. Workman would be safe until he can complete his work?"

But Charity shook her head. Although she had lived thereabouts for some years she knew little more of the district than the way to Armadales' and back. Whenever she had a holiday she and Dickie escaped from their immediate surroundings and went elsewhere—even if it were for only an hour or two into Greenwich Park. And she confessed her inability to think of any place where Laurence and his machine could find a harbour of refuge.

Suddenly Dickie, who had been stumping up and down the room, cracking the joints of his fingers, running his fingers through his hair,

and indulging in other exercises indicative and illustrative of intense thought, uttered a loud exclamation expressive of great glee.

"Hooray!" he cried. "Hooray! I know, Charity, I know, ma'am, where Mr. Workman could go with his machine and be as safe—as safe as anything! Hooray!"

"Where, Dickie, where? How can you know?" asked his sister.

"I do know," he asserted. "And so will you, when I tell you. Listen—Uncle Waple's barn!"

Charity nodded her head with a smile of understanding. "That's clever of you, Dickie," she said. "Yes, he would have plenty of room and quiet there, and if Uncle Waple knew what was going on he would take care that no one came within fifty yards of the barn while Mr. Workman was busy there."

Miss Delomosne looked from one to the other. "But where is this—what are you talking about?" she asked.

"My brother is speaking of a large barn which stands in his yard at Canterbury," replied Charity. "We used to play in it when we were children. It has been empty for years now. My uncle, Mr. Waple, knows Mr. Workman;



it was in his house that Mr. Workman's papers were stolen. I was there at the time."

"Ah, then she is the Canterbury young lady!" thought Miss Delomosne to herself. Aloud she said: "Come, both of you—we will go to Mr. Workman at once; he must be persuaded—no, made to take his machine to your uncle's this very night!"

"She must have a wonderful power of persuasion over him," thought Charity, who was not quite so certain as Miss Delomosne seemed to be. But she at once rose to carry out her visitor's suggestion, further urged thereto by Dickie, who was impatient to be with Laurence again. All three left the flat and hurried away once more to Laurence's lodgings. Arrived there, they wasted no time in sending the landlady upstairs to announce them, but marched up, headed by Dickie, and walked into the sitting-room without ceremony.

The inventor sat at his table, a picture of anything but joyfulness. His elbows were propped on the table; his cheek was sunk in his hands; his eyes were angry. He glared at them as if they were enemies.

"Now, Mr. Workman," said Miss Delomosne, advancing upon him with decision, "while you

—positively for the first time in your life, I should think!—have been allowing yourself to be cast down, which is very bad for you, we three have been holding a committee meeting to decide upon your best plan of action for the discomfiture of your enemies, and——”

Laurence made an impatient gesture. “I am not afraid of enemies!” he exclaimed. “It is if that man Sabatier has——”

“Never mind Monsieur Sabatier and all his cleverness,” said Miss Delomosne. “What you have got to do is to finish your work. And we have thought of a plan by which you can do it in safety.”

Laurence sat up and stared at all three of them in turn.

“A magnificent plan, Mr. Workman!” said Dickie, who was nearly dancing with excitement.

“Listen to what Miss Delomosne proposes,” urged Charity.

Laurence ran his hands through his hair and stood erect. “You’re all very good to me,” he said, humbly. “I confess that the mere mention of Sabatier knocked me over. You see, Sabatier——”

“We forbid you to mention Sabatier until

you have heard what we have to say," commanded Miss Delomosne. "Sit down, Miss Wraye; sit down, Mr. Dickie, for I am going to sit down myself. Now, Mr. Workman, we want you to be both frank and explicit. So please to answer these questions. First: Supposing you can work in a place of perfect safety—and you must really recognise that you are no longer safe at Armadales' now that Sir John Bedford is desperate and has duplicate keys—how soon can you finish your work?"

"Well, by working very hard, and with Dickie to help me, in perhaps a week," answered Laurence.

"Then, next—and you must trust us in this—is your engine ready when your machine is ready, and can it be fitted quickly?"

"Yes," he replied, "it is ready. It's been ready a fortnight; but, of course, nobody but myself knows where it is. As a matter of fact, it's close by here—at least, it's in London, and it can be fitted in an hour."

"In an hour? Then there's only an hour's really serious work?"

Laurence smiled. "To tell you the real truth," he said, "the machine and the engine don't matter a bit—at least, only relatively.

The machine is simply a biplane; the engine is a motor. The secret lies in the power which drives the motor. It's a chemical secret. That's what I'm afraid of Sabatier having discovered."

"Once more, never mind Sabatier. Now, then, when the whole is ready, to whom is it to be offered?"

"Why, to the British Government, of course!" answered Laurence. "That's what I came over for. I'm an Englishman."

"Have you had any negotiations?"

"Yes, I have," replied Laurence. "Nobody knows that I have, but I have. As soon as I am ready two officials will test the truth of my theory."

"Capital!" said Miss Delomosne. "All that is wanted now is speed and decision—and instant action. Mr. Workman, you must get your machine away from Armadales' to-night."

"To-night?"

"To-night—this very night. I judge you have the right of entry to the works at any time, night or day?"

"I have, certainly."

"Very well. I understand from Mr. Dickie here that your machine is very light, and can be carried on a light drag or waggon?"

"Yes; Dickie is quite right," he replied.

"Would it go on a large waggonette?"

"Oh yes—easily."

"Very well. Now, listen. You must go round to the nearest livery stables and order a two-horsed waggonette to be at the gates of Armadales' at, say, midnight. It's only half-past ten, so you have plenty of time. You must have it driven into your workshop, and you and Mr. Dickie and the driver must pack the machine and whatever you want on it. Then you must drive with it to Mr. Waple's, at Canterbury."

Laurence uttered an exclamation of astonishment, not unmixed with pleasure. He was about to speak, but Miss Delomosne went on:

"Mr. Waple, it seems, has a barn, now empty, in which you can complete your labours," she said. "And, as for security, Miss Wraye tells me that if her uncle is taken into your confidence he will see that no one ever comes within fifty yards of his barn while you are working there."

Laurence leaped to his feet and smote his hands together. "Splendid! Grand!" he almost shouted. "Ah! the excellent Mr. Waple—a regiment of Bedfords would not get past him if he stood before them. It is fine—we will

do it. Whose thought was it?" And he looked hard at Charity.

"No—it was Dickie's," said Charity.

"I remembered the barn," said Dickie, modestly. "It is a big barn."

"And you are a big man for thinking of it," laughed Laurence, to whom all his old cheerfulness seemed to have come back. "Come, we will get to work at once. I will go round to the livery stables and make my arrangements; we will not wait until twelve o'clock for a start. A large waggonette, two stout horses, a good tarpaulin sheet—that is all we want."

"If Dickie is to go," said Charity, "he will want a coat and a rug; he should also have some supper. You know you must, Dickie," she went on, seeing signs of impatience on her brother's part. "Unless you are taken care of what use will you be to Mr. Workman when you get there?"

"Your sister is right," said Miss Delomosne. "Mr. Workman, cannot your landlady provide some hot supper for Mr. Dickie while you are arranging about the waggonette? Then he will be all the better fitted to be of assistance."

"Yes, yes!" answered Laurence, who was already bustling about, collecting papers, note-



books, and instruments, and thrusting them into a bag. "I will ring for her and give her orders. Eat, Dickie, and then come round to the works. I shall leave the proper instructions for your admittance."

Charity stopped him as he was about to ring the bell. "No, please," she said. "Dickie and I will go home, and as soon as he has had some supper he and I will come round. We won't trouble your landlady, because I know best how to look after him. Come, Dickie, do as I tell you."

With that she swept Dickie (who protested volubly that he would soon be down at the works) away, leaving Laurence and Miss Delomosne alone. As she watched him bustling about a sudden resolution filled her.

"I'll go with you to the works and help you!" she said.

He turned and gazed at her in amazement. "You?" he exclaimed.

"Why not? I am young and strong—much stronger than that poor boy with his big, faithful eyes," she answered. "And I have plenty of intelligence to do whatever you tell me to do. No one will know me. I have only been inside the yard once in my life. Besides, I have a heavy veil."



Laurence snapped the catch of his bag. "Very well," he said. "Come along, then."

Leaving the house together they walked sharply away to the end of the square. And the man who had watched Miss Delomosne since she first left Laurence's lodgings came once more out of the shadows and cautiously followed them.

## CHAPTER XXV

Sir John Bedford was up earlier than usual on the morning following these events, and at eight o'clock had already sat down to his breakfast and his private correspondence. There were several letters lying by his plate. He turned them over quickly, and picked out one in the bold handwriting of Monsieur Sabatier.

"MY DEAR FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE," it ran,

"After delays which have been most trying and vexatious I am assured of ultimate success within a few days—possibly within forty-eight hours. It must be your part to see that no further progress is made in that other direction. I have already arranged for the coming of the representative of that government you know of, and he will be here the day after to-morrow; so, too, our colleague the Abbé. You, of course, will be here. Our Berlin friend, I grieve to say, is still confined to his room on account of his accident, but we will rejoice his heart with our good news.

"Thy comrade,  
"PAUL."

Sir John laid this confident epistle aside, with a muttered grunt of anything but satisfaction.

"That's just like Sabatier," he said; "always cocksure of triumph, as he calls it, and always putting it off just as he's going to achieve it. I expect I must go over there to-night; but I must know what's going on here first. Wilson," he said, as his servant entered the room, "I'm expecting a man to call with a message this morning, about half-past eight. As soon as he comes bring him up here."

Then he read his remaining letters and glanced over the papers, and so occupied himself until half-past eight chimed from the clock on the mantelpiece, and the door opened and admitted Wilson and the man who had followed Miss Delomosne about the previous night.

"The person you expected, Sir John," said Wilson, and retired silently.

"Ah! sit down," said Sir John. He went calmly on with his breakfast, and for some minutes showed no more sense of his visitor's presence than if he had been the chair on which he sat. And the visitor glanced at Sir John and then at Sir John's surroundings, and a strange look crossed his face. He was a tall, handsome man, with pale careworn features, and there was

an expression in his eyes which was strangely nervous and alert. He looked as if he were perpetually on guard, always looking for something. As for the rest of his appearance, he was very smartly dressed in a suit of blue serge, wore good gloves, hat, and boots, and looked, save for his careworn expression, like a naval officer or a traveller returned from a voyage, for his face was bronzed and tanned as if by constant contact with the weather.

Sir John finished his breakfast at last, strolled over to the smoking cabinet, selected a cigar, lighted it with great deliberation, and then deigned to look upon his visitor.

"Well?" he said, laconically.

"I went down there," the visitor replied.

"Well?"

"She came there," the visitor continued.

Sir John nodded his head, and blew away a cloud of smoke. "Oh, she did!" he said. "Very well. Now I know. Tell me all about it in your own way. Here, have a cigar—and get yourself some coffee if you will. I don't suppose you've had either lately."

The man's eyes shot a gleam of fire, and his face flushed as he picked up the cigar which Sir John flung to him as he might have thrown a bone

to a dog, but he made no reply. He lighted the cigar, and after a moment's hesitation poured himself out a cup of coffee.

"I went down to the address you gave me," he went on, quietly, "and I watched there from dusk onwards. She came as it began to get dark. After she had been there some little time a tall man with a military moustache——"

"That's he," said Sir John, nodding his head. "Go on."

"Came out," continued the visitor, "and made off hurriedly. Then a young woman arrived at the house, in company with a lame and deformed boy——"

"I know them," said the listener.

"After they had been there a few minutes the man came hurrying back. After a time she and the young woman and the lame boy came out. She went in one direction and they in another. Before she had gone far she turned round and ran after them. There was some conversation, and then all three walked to some flats close by, and went up one of the stairways. They came down again in about a quarter of an hour, and went back to the house which she had first entered. They were still some little time there; then the young woman and the lame boy came out and

went away towards the flats. Two or three minutes later she and the man came out and went off together."

"Together?" exclaimed Sir John.

"Yes, to some livery stables close by. They were in the yard there some time, and at last, when they came out, they were followed by a two-horsed waggonette. They walked down to the works, the waggonette following them. When they got there they both went into the lodge, and presently the porter opened the big gates and admitted the waggonette."

"Whereupon, of course, you couldn't see any more," said Sir John.

"I waited to see her come out. Before long, after their arrival, the young woman and the lame boy came and were admitted through the lodge. I had to wait quite an hour and a half after that before seeing anything else. Then the gates opened and they all came out."

"Waggonette as well?"

"Yes. It appeared to be loaded or packed with something which was completely covered up by a tarpaulin sheet. Outside the gate the man and the lame boy got up by the driver and drove off; she and the young woman walked away to

the nearest cab-stand. There she got a hansom and returned to Eaton Square."

"Confound it all, man, but where did the waggonette go?" asked Sir John.

"I had no instructions about the waggonette," replied the visitor. "You told me to keep an eye on her if she turned up there."

"You might have used your common sense, any way," growled Sir John. "At any rate, you know the place where they got the waggonette."

"Oh yes—Hargrove's livery stables."

"Then you can find out easily enough where they went to," said Sir John.

"Supposing the driver's had strict orders not to tell?"

"Then you must open his mouth with some coin of the realm," said Sir John.

The man finished his coffee and looked about him uncomfortably. "It's running a great risk to be seen about there in the daytime," he said. "You know how well known I was."

"If I'm to help you to clear out for good," said Sir John, unconcernedly, "you must run a risk or two to help me. Where would you have been, I wonder, if I hadn't come across you?"



"Well, what am I to do, then?" asked the other, half sullenly.

"What you're bid, and I'll get you across to France safely," answered Sir John. "Perhaps you'll meet your old friend Shepheard there—I've just found out where he is."

"Let me know where he is, and I'll do anything for you!" exclaimed the visitor.

"All in good time," said Sir John. "Now go down to that livery stable again, and find out where the waggonette went. Here's some money—make as cheap a bargain as you can, but make it. And when you've made it, ring me up in my private room at the offices and I'll tell you what to do next."

The visitor put the loose gold which Sir John handed him into his pocket and rose to go. He looked round the room and seemed inclined to linger.

"It's no pleasant thing to pace the streets wondering if you're not going to feel a hand on your shoulder at every yard," he said, bitterly.

"I don't think you're running as much risk as all that," said Sir John. "You might be taken for a gentleman, dressed as you are."

The visitor laughed—a harsh, grating laugh. The glint of his teeth was not pleasant.

“Go and get on with your work,” said Sir John. “I’m busy. And look here, Mr. Penrose, none of your histrionics. You ought to feel very grateful to me. Do what I tell you, and I’ll help you across the water. And I’ll tell you where Shepherd is, and then you can break his neck and get yourself guillotined for it afterwards, and there’ll be an end of both of you. Now then, once more, be off!”

Penrose snarled again and went out. When he was once outside the door of Sir John’s dining-room he stopped for a moment and looked back with an expression which it might have done that gentleman good to see, inasmuch as it might have warned him not to play too much with edged tools. Then he went out into the streets, and made his way in the direction of Southwark, using various methods of transit, and always apprehensive of being hailed. Passing through Southwark, Penrose, after turning a certain thought over in his mind, went into a post-office and took out a gun-licence under an assumed name and address. In a street a little further on he called at a gunmaker’s and purchased a revolver and a supply of cartridges.

He slipped the revolver into his hip-pocket, and felt a sense of gratification at possessing it. "I can't trust him any further than I can see him," he said to himself. "He's very likely only using me as a cat's-paw; and, any way, it'll come in handy—for Shephard."

Then he made his way to the livery stable; and, as luck would have it, there came into the yard just at the time he reached it what he believed to be the very waggonette he had seen leaving it the night before. The vehicle was dusty and splashed; the horses were tired; the driver was probably sleepy.

Under pretence of making some inquiry as to a conveyance, Penrose got into conversation with the driver, and soon found out that he had been on an all-night journey to Canterbury and back. He invited the man to drink, and before long had him in a confidential mood.

"Look here," said Penrose, "I saw you set off from Armadales' works last night, and I've a particular desire to know where you went. I can put a sovereign in your hand if you'll tell me."

The man looked at his questioner suspiciously. "You're not a 'tec, guv'nor?" he said. "I don't want no pleece business."

"No, no!" answered Penrose. "Curiosity, that's all. I wondered why they wanted to remove anything at that time of night."

"Well, I don't know as I was asked not to speak," said the driver; "and, as a matter of fact, I wasn't. Make it a couple o' quid, guv'nor, and I'll tell you. Thank yer, guv'nor. Well, what I carried in that there waggonette was one of these here flying machines. I know, 'cause I helped to load and unload it. I expect him what invented it's going flying with it—to France or the Continent, very likely."

"Ah, gone to the coast, eh?" asked Penrose.

"No, guv'nor; we took it to a big barn at a place called the Three Travellers, in Canterbury. Going to finish it off there, I reckon," said the driver.

Penrose telephoned this information to Sir John Bedford early in the afternoon, and received instructions to call on him at Queen Anne's Mansions again that evening, and to be in readiness to go to France with him, if he decided to make the trip. But Sir John had been perplexed and uncertain all day as to what he should do. There was now no doubt that Miss Delomosne had gone over to Laurence's

side entirely, and that Laurence had removed his machine out of danger at her instigation. If Sabatier was to be first in the field Laurence's progress must be stopped; but the problem was—how to stop it. Sir John spent a good many hours that afternoon trying to think over some effective plan of action, and it was nearly evening when he left the offices and returned home. He rang for his servant as soon as he got in. "The man who was here this morning will call to-night," he said. "Bring him up at once."

Then he went into his study, and, unlocking a safe, took from it a round object, apparently fashioned of steel and about the size of a cricket-ball, which was enclosed in a small case of leather, very thickly lined and padded with cotton-wool. He looked it over thoughtfully, and then put the case in a drawer of his desk.

## CHAPTER XXVI

When Penrose arrived at Queen Anne's Mansions that evening he found Sir John Bedford in his study, apparently at peace with all the world, seeing that he was seated in the easiest of easy-chairs, and enjoying a fragrant cigar and some equally fragrant coffee. There was another easy-chair close by, and on a table between the two, cigars, coffee, and liqueurs were set out. And upon this occasion Sir John invited his visitor to help himself to these creature comforts, not in the sneering fashion of the morning, but with a free and careless affability which made Penrose wonder what was afoot.

"So the destination of the mysterious wagonette was the Three Travellers at Canterbury, eh?" he began when Penrose had poured out a cup of coffee and lighted a cigar. "Do you know Canterbury?"

"No, I have never been there—never even passed through the place," answered Penrose.

"So much the better—there will be the less

chance of your being recognised," said Sir John. "By-the-by, have they"—he inclined his head in the direction of New Scotland Yard—"have they issued any photographs of you?"

Penrose frowned, and the hunted look came across his features again. He shook his head. "Not that I know of," he replied. "I looked in some of the illustrated papers, and at—at some of the boards outside the police-stations, but I've never seen anything. I saw in one of the evening papers this afternoon that it's supposed I've fallen into one of the crevasses amongst the Devonshire tors."

"That's a good job," said Sir John, sipping his coffee. "And it's a good job you're not known in Canterbury, because I want you to go there."

Penrose did not seem to receive this news with any distinct pleasure. "I understood you would help me across the Channel," he said.

"When the business is done," answered Sir John, coolly. "Performance first—pay afterwards. Now then, I want to talk to you. First of all, if you get across the Channel—which, you may take it, you shall—what do you intend to do? The French police are



pretty smart, you know, and they're well in touch with their English colleagues."

"I want to get away to South America," answered Penrose. "To Brazil, or Argentina."

"That'll need money," remarked Sir John. Penrose made no answer.

"I'll find you your passage money," continued Sir John, "and give you a couple of hundred to go on with when you get there—if you earn it."

Penrose shifted a little uneasily in his chair, and nervously shook off the ash from the end of his cigar. "Is it anything very dangerous?" he asked.

"Well, there's nothing that's really well worth doing in the way of adventure that isn't, at any rate, a little dangerous, is there?" said Sir John. "However, there's nothing very dangerous in this—to you."

"What is it?" asked Penrose, after a reflective pause.

Sir John helped himself to another liqueur, and dangled one leg over the side of his chair, as if disposing himself for a free-and-easy chat.

"Well," he said, "the driver of the wagonette told you this afternoon that what he

had transported to Canterbury was an aeroplane. He was quite right—so it is. It's a biplane, not so vastly different, not so very much superior in design and execution from those we have seen since Bleriot flew the English Channel, but epoch-making in another way, because of the motive power which will drive it. And that's the secret of its inventor, the young fellow whom you saw the other night."

"With—her?" asked Penrose.

"Precisely—with her," answered Sir John. "The young fellow, presumably considering himself not safe at Armadales', has transferred the scene of his labour to a barn at the Three Travellers. Eh?"

"I think I understand," said Penrose, slowly.

"It's fairly, if not absolutely, clear," continued Sir John. "There he means to put the finishing touches to his work."

"Well?" asked Penrose.

Sir John leant forward and looked his man steadily in the face. "Those finishing touches must not be made," he said, in a low voice, and with a significant tone.

"Why?"

"Because it doesn't suit my purposes that they should be," replied Sir John.

"From a business point of view?"

"Yes—in more ways than one. The fact is," said Sir John, "a few friends and myself are hurrying on the completion of an invention of an almost precisely similar nature, and we wish—and intend—to be first in the field. And, therefore, this young fellow's labours must be brought to a sudden termination so that we may step in first."

Penrose made no remark on this, but sat watching and waiting.

"It seems to me," Sir John continued, "that considering your present position, your need of a helping hand, and your desire to betake yourself to another climate, you're the very man to undertake this little affair."

Penrose remained silent for a full half-minute, staring straight at the man who sat opposite him, with a strange, questioning look in his sinister eyes. Then he leaped to his feet with a sharp exclamation, throwing away his cigar.

"By Heaven!" he said. "I'm not going to undertake any murders! I——"

Sir John laughed sneeringly. "Murders!" he said. "My dear fellow, do you take me for a fool, to think I should suggest such unpleasant topics to any man. I don't want to find myself

in the dock at the Old Bailey as accessory before the fact—not I!”

“What do you want, then?” asked Penrose, watching him suspiciously.

“Sit down and take a fresh cigar,” said Sir John. “I merely want you to undertake a little task, the successful performance of which will stop this young man from perfecting his work for some little time. That’s all.”

“Why don’t you do it yourself?” asked Penrose.

“Nothing would give me greater pleasure and satisfaction,” answered Sir John, “but, unfortunately, I am somewhat well known in Canterbury, and all the people concerned in this affair are also particularly acquainted with me. Now, you are entirely unknown, and can carry out the transaction quite satisfactorily, if you use as much—or half as much—intelligence and resource as you showed in effecting your escape from——”

“Leave that alone!” growled Penrose, with a nervous glance at the door. “Come to the point. What do you want me to do?”

Sir John rose, and going over to his desk opened a drawer and produced the square case which he had taken from his safe earlier in the

evening. Holding this in his hand, he turned once more to Penrose.

"I want you," he said, slowly, "to travel down to Canterbury to-morrow morning—you can stay here for the night, and go from here—and when you arrive there to make yourself acquainted with the Three Travellers. It will not take you long to see the lie of the land. Now, if this young man is perfecting his invention in the barn of the inn it will be your duty to find out how you can obtain access to that barn, or, at any rate, to get within reasonable distance of it. If I know anything of the young man he will have surrounded himself with safeguards, so you will have to exercise considerable diplomacy. But the main thing is to find an opportunity of placing inside or in immediate proximity to the walls of that barn—this !"

He lifted the stout leathern lid of the case, and revealed the small steel globe lying inside in its thick nest of cottonwool. The light from the lamps flashed upon its highly-polished surface in a thousand coruscations.

Penrose stared, thought, and suddenly comprehended. And once more he jumped to his feet, rapping out a sharp exclamation. "A bomb !"

Sir John ran his finger over the shining sphere caressingly. "Quite correct," he said. "And a very beautiful bit of work. This steel shell is as delicate as the most delicate china, yet it confines a power sufficient to blow these rooms to pieces. I shall be sorry to part with this—I have always admired it so!"

"It's a queer thing to possess," remarked Penrose.

"I came by it in a queer way," said Sir John. "You may think you are running an enormous risk in carrying it as far as Canterbury. I, my dear sir, carried it from Odessa to London, and lived with it night and day. There is no danger in it," he said, lifting the steel globe from its padded nest, and holding it up to Penrose, "until you move that small knob—there—from left to right. Within half an hour of that—ah!"

He gently replaced the explosive machine in its case, and put the case back in the drawer, which he then locked. "Do you understand now?" he asked.

Penrose took a turn or two about the room. "I thought there was to be no loss of life," he said.

"If there is," answered Sir John, "it will



be your own fault. Study the habits of the people who use the barn, and find your opportunity when they're out. It's no part of my policy to destroy any life—I want that machine smashed up. Use your wits—you're a clear-headed man; you don't drink—your brain ought to be sharp enough. When one wants to do a thing, one's a fool if one doesn't find the opportunity of doing it—it only needs seeking."

"So I am to go in the morning?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Sir John, "and I think perhaps the best thing to do will be for me to run you down in my motor. At any rate, I'll take you as far as the station next to Canterbury, and you can go on by train. Then I'll have a run round and come back to Canterbury at night, and you can meet me at the Star Hotel and report progress. I'll take care not to be seen. Call in at the post-office in the afternoon—say three-thirty—and ask if there's a wire for Edwards."

It was about noon next day when Penrose, carrying a gladstone bag, which Sir John's servant had found for him, walked out of the station at Canterbury and made his way towards the heart of the city. Acting on Sir



John's instructions, he soon found a quiet hotel, and, leaving his bag—securely locked—there, he set out to look for the Three Travellers, which ancient hostelry he came across in less time than he had expected. He took its main features in at a glance—there was the old house, built round three sides of a cobble-paved quadrangle; there was the garden stretching away all round the sides and back of the house, and merging into a large orchard. And at the side of the orchard, standing in the very middle of a small paddock, was what was, without doubt, the barn—a plaster-and-timber walled erection, roofed by old red tiles.

And at the gate of the paddock was—a policeman! And further up the paddock, at the rear of the barn, was another! No one, however ingenious, would ever be able to get near that barn while they were there. The big question was: Were they there all night?

Penrose walked across the quadrangle and entered the low-ceilinged parlour in which Laurence had first met Charity. One of the biggest men he had ever set eyes on stood behind the bar, reading a newspaper with the aid of a pair of large spectacles. He looked up at the sound of Penrose's footsteps, and it seemed to

the latter that he was favoured with a stare of very critical inspection.

"Servant, sir," said Mr. Waple. "Fine day for a walk, sir."

"A beautiful day," replied Penrose, and asked for a glass of ale. He took a pull at the glass which the landlord handed him and looked round the parlour. "One gets hungry sight-seeing," he said. "I suppose I can get some lunch here."

"Yes, sir," answered Mr. Waple. "Coffee-room in there, sir. Cold meats and pigeon-pie ready now, but at one sharp there'll be a hot luncheon."

"Then I'll wait until one," said Penrose, and took a seat. "Anything going on?" he said, nodding through the window near which he sat at the view of barn and paddock and policeman. "Is there going to be a sale?"

Mr. Waple folded up the newspaper and put it on a shelf behind him, sandwiched between two bottles.

"No, sir," he replied. "No, there ain't no sale—at least, not just now. The policeman's a private matter, sir—not public."

"Oh!" exclaimed Penrose, endeavouring to look as mystified as possible. "Dear me!"

Mr. Waple drew a measure of ale for himself. "Yes, sir," he said, when he had drunk, "them officers is on guard. They've to keep anybody and everybody, no matter who he or she may be, from approaching that there barn of mine until its present tenant has completed a certain work which he's a-doing of there. On duty they are, sir, by night as well as by day. Watch-dogs as never tires, sir."

"Dear me!" said Penrose. "The work must be of very great importance."

"Ah, so it must!" replied Mr. Waple, mysteriously. "So it must indeed, sir."

Penrose lingered in the bar-parlour until nearly one o'clock, and then entered the coffee-room. He had already commenced his lunch when Laurence and Dickie came in, both in blue blouses and overalls, both greasy and somewhat grimy. Penrose, of course, recognised them both, but affected not to do so; he merely glanced at them as they passed through the coffee-room into an inner apartment, and made no sign.

But Dickie Wraye, once inside the bedroom into which they had gone to take off their working things and wash for lunch, turned eagerly to Laurence.

"Mr. Workman," he said, "that's the man I told you about—the man who was hanging about when Miss Delomosne was talking to Charity the night you and I left London. I'm sure it is!"

Laurence stared at him.

"I'm sure it is!" repeated Dickie. "You see, I saw him twice—once when we went into our flat and once when we came out. What's he doing down here?"

## CHAPTER XXVII

People who have spent much time in rural districts are very well aware that just as there are persons in London who could not give a name to St. Paul's or to the Bank of England if they saw either, so there are folk in Arcadia who cannot tell an inquirer the way to places with which they are familiar, nor particularise on facts with which they have been well acquainted since childhood. In both these cases ignorance must be put down to a lack of curiosity. If one could but get at the state of mind of the persons concerned one would find that they neither desired nor cared to know anything or to be told anything; that, in short, the sense of curiosity was entirely lacking in their mental equipment.

There are, however, certain persons in the world, in whom, if that same spirit of curiosity is roused, there immediately springs into existence such an active desire to satisfy it that nothing but instant gratification will avail. Such a person was the little man who had acted as

driver of the waggonette on which Laurence, Dickie Wraye, and the skeleton airship were conveyed to the haven of refuge at the Three Travellers. It was not this journey, however, which aroused inquisitiveness in him. A few years since and he would have thrilled with excited delight at the notion of having biplane or monoplane behind him and his horses; now that these marvellous affairs had begun to fly about the sky with something approaching commonness they did not appeal to him so much. Neither was there anything very appealing in a journey by night. What did appeal to his curiosity—when he came to consider matters—was the fact that a man had actually paid him two golden sovereigns to hear where he had driven the waggonette and its occupants to.

It was not, however, until some hours after Penrose left him that this feeling of inquisitiveness flowered to fulness in his mind. In consideration of the fact that he had been out all night he was awarded a holiday for the rest of that afternoon and evening, and he immediately went home and retired to sleep. Rising refreshed about six o'clock, and further refreshing himself by a meat tea, he began to think over recent events, and to discuss them

with his wife, to whom he had magnanimously presented one of the sovereigns.

"And, of course, I knows who the little crippled chap what rode between me and the young man is," he said. "I see him many times as I been a-comin' and a-goin' out o' our yard below. Lives with his sister up staircase B, they do. I seen her too; looks like a schoolmistress or somethink o' that sort. Now, I wonder, M'ria, what that there chap was so keen as to want to know where I drove 'em to that he'd spring two quid for the information? 'Cause two quid is two quid!"

"I dunno," said his wife. "The money's good, anyway."

"I see to that, you bet," said the driver. "But what's he want to know for—what business was it of his?"

Then, thinking that it would be very much his own business if he went out and had an hour or so at the Lamb and Donkey, and afterwards bought something tasty for supper, he left his rooms—which were in the same dwellings where Charity and her brother lived—and set out. But he was not destined to reach his favourite house of call just then. At the corner of the street was the police-



station of the district, and in accordance with custom he paused in passing it to look at the board on which were exhibited the various notices, grim and gruesome, about people who were missing, or had been found dead, or had run away from wives and children, or were wanted. And he had scarcely looked at it when he gave a sharp whistle and elbowed his way through some small boys and girls until he was nearer—near enough to read the smaller type which lay beneath two heavy black lines in great capitals, "Wanted: Edward Penrose."

But it was not the reading—other than the amount of the reward—which interested him so much as a portrait beneath the big capitals. He gazed at this as if fascinated. Then, pushing his way to the door of the police-station, he entered and asked for an inspector.

Five minutes later the driver came out again, a man who was obviously a policeman, but in plain clothes, with him. They were in earnest conversation, and they turned in the direction of the dwellings which the driver had just left. There they went up the staircase which led to Charity's flat, and in due course knocked at her door.

Charity had only just come in from the office, and was getting her evening meal ready. The little flat felt strangely lonely without Dickie, and the sharp tap at her outer door made her start. She was more startled when she opened it and saw two men standing there.

"Beg pardon, miss—it's all right, miss," said the driver, who noticed her perturbation. "You'll remember me. It was me as drove your poor brother and the tall gentleman in the waggonette last night."

"Oh yes, I remember you," replied Charity. "There's nothing wrong, is there?"

"Not as I knows of, miss. I left 'em right enough. But, you see, miss, when I got back to-day this here happened," and he went on to tell her of the episode in the livery stable yard. "You don't happen to know why that there gent should be so very partikler about findin' out where the waggonette had gone as to give me two sov'rins for tellin' him, miss?"

"I? No—oh no!" replied Charity.

"And you don't know any such man as he has described to you?" said the detective.

"No, certainly not," she answered.

The detective drew out a copy of the bill which had attracted the driver's attention.

"You don't know this man?" he asked, pointing to the portrait.

Charity looked, wondered, and shook her head.

"Well, miss," said the driver, "I'll take my solemn oath an' 'davy that's the bloke what come to me in the stable-yard at two o'clock this afternoon, and give me two quid for tellin' him where I drove your poor brother and the other gentleman to. And seein' as he's wanted, and there's a reward out for him, I hope, mister, as you'll see as how I gets it."

Charity was reading the bill with wondering eyes. The information in it frightened her—her thoughts immediately turned to Dickie. "Why should this man want to know where they had gone?" she exclaimed. "Do you think my brother will be in danger?"

"I wouldn't be frightened yet," said the detective. "It may have been a case of extraordinary resemblance—or you may have made a mistake," he added, turning to the driver, who immediately protested vehemently and made another reference to the reward. "Well, never mind," he went on. "It's no use bothering this young lady further. You come back with me, and see if you can tell us more."

"May I keep this bill?" asked Charity.

"Why, certainly, if you like," answered the detective, regarding her curiously.

"I see that this man was employed at Armadales'," she said. "I'm employed there too. This must have happened just before I went there."

"Well, if you should ever hear anything let us know," said the detective, and went off with the driver, who seemed to be labouring under a delusion that he ought to lay hands on the reward there and then.

Charity had small appetite for her supper. What could this man—any man—mean by paying two pounds to be informed of the precise destination of the waggonette? Of course it was part of the conspiracy against Mr. Workman; but it would involve poor Dickie, who could do little to help himself. And did it imply harm to Mr. Workman? It must, surely. Could it be the same man—this Edward Penrose? Yet the driver seemed positive beyond doubt.

She felt that it was impossible to stay in her rooms alone with this vague uncertainty, this indefinable fear of coming evil upon her. For a few minutes she thought of going round to see

a girl friend who was employed in the same department, and she put on her hat and jacket with the intention of doing so. Then it flashed across her that if there was one person who might tell her anything—might reassure her—it was Miss Delomosne, and without a moment's hesitation she locked her door and set out for the West End.

Charity was well acquainted with the whereabouts of Sir Herbert Armadale's house, and within an hour she was knocking at the door in Eaton Square. But there a disappointment met her—Miss Delomosne was not at home. She had motored down to Hurstdene Manor that afternoon with Sir Herbert, and would be away for possibly three days.

Going homewards Charity was still perturbed and anxious. She dared not face the loneliness of the flat, and she turned into the friend's house of whom she had first thought. But there she was so preoccupied and thoughtful that she felt it useless to inflict herself on others. She went back to the flat and passed an almost sleepless night, and rose early in the morning, still anxious and miserable. She waited eagerly for the coming of the postman, hoping that there might be a letter from Dickie;

but no letter arrived. And then she took a sudden, definite resolution—she would go to Hurstdene Manor, find Miss Delomosne, and tell her of what had happened.

With Charity, her mind once made up, to think was to act. She forced herself to eat some breakfast, and then set out, calling in at a public telephone office to send word to her department that she could not attend that morning, and possibly not in the afternoon. On the way to the railway station she saw the bill about Penrose several times on the police notice-boards: every sight of it filled her with apprehension.

It was not a long way from London Bridge to Hurstdene Manor as the crow flies, but she got a train which stopped at every station, and found at the end of her journey that she must either hire a conveyance or walk three miles. Having in her excitement forgotten to bring more money with her than a few shillings which she had in her purse, the continuance of her journey on foot was a necessity, and it was past noon when she reached the house. But she found Miss Delomosne at home, and in a few minutes was in her room.

Miss Delomosne heard Charity's story in



silence, looking hard all the while at the bill which the girl put into her hand. She did not speak for some time after Charity had told her everything.

"Do you think the driver of the waggonette really thought that the man who bribed him was identical with—this man?" she asked, pointing to the portrait.

"He declared himself positive," replied Charity. "He said there was not a doubt of it. Why should this man, this escaped convict, want to know where they had gone to the night before last? He must have meant harm."

Miss Delomosne nodded her head. "It is some new departure on Sir John Bedford's part," she said. "I can't guess what, nor think what. Has your uncle a telephone?"

"No; he hates anything like that," answered Charity. "He dislikes anyone to send him a telegram."

Miss Delomosne glanced at the clock. "Sir Herbert has gone to Maidstone for the afternoon," she said. "Come and have some lunch, and then we will go into Canterbury, I will order a motor to be ready. That will set your mind at rest, and I think—I hope we may be able to do some good."



Two hours later they drove into Canterbury. At the outskirts of the city Miss Delomosne set Charity down. She had already given her instructions to go straight to the Three Travellers, to find out if anything had been seen there of Penrose, but without arousing suspicion, and then to come to her at the Star with news. Charity hurried away on her mission, and within an hour was with Miss Delomosne at the appointed place.

"He's been there!" she said. "He was there for lunch—had lunch in the coffee-room, with Mr. Workman and Dickie. And Dickie knew him! But he's gone again."

Miss Delomosne, who had engaged a private room, signalled Charity to speak in a low voice. She went near to her.

"Listen!" she said. "He's here—and so is John Bedford! But they don't know I'm here, and they mustn't. Go back—and stay there until you hear from me or see me. And if you see Mr. Workman or your brother, bid them look out to-night."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

When Sir John Bedford met Penrose down at the roadside station a few miles out of Canterbury he had the whole afternoon before him. He had brought his motor-car out himself, not wishing even his chauffeur to know where he was going that day, and when Penrose had gone he let his hands rest idly on the steering-wheel, and sat for some minutes considering various matters. Suddenly he set the machinery in motion.

"I'll run down as far as Dover, have some lunch there, and get into touch with Sabatier," he said to himself. "He ought to have some news by this time that should be useful to us."

Having no desire to be seen in Canterbury at that time of day, Sir John turned his car round and set off for Dover by way of Ashford and Folkestone, proceeding towards his destination in as leisurely and debonair a manner as if he had never a care in the world. Arrived at the

Lord Warden, he put the car up, and strolling off to the telegraph office sent a lengthy message to Sabatier, asking him to reply to the hotel. Then he lunched, with good appetite and great satisfaction, and subsequently strolled on the pier outside, until a servant came out with the expected reply. He sat down on the nearest seat, and opened the flimsy envelope as coolly as if it had been a circular. He read Sabatier's message half aloud.

"Have made such excellent progress that am in position to charge the motor this afternoon. Bremond is here, and all is ready. Shall I go ahead, or shall we await your arrival? If we proceed at once we can give first demonstration to-morrow, when representative will arrive. Reply at once."

Sir John read and re-read this communication, folded the telegram deliberately, and as deliberately placed it in his pocket-book. After a moment's thought he lighted a cigar, and, strolling back to the hotel, paid his bill, then getting into his car, went off once more to the post-office, where he despatched two wires. The first, addressed to Sabatier, ran:

"Congratulations. Go ahead at once, and immediately wire me charge is successfully made

this afternoon or evening to Star Hotel, Canterbury. I shall come over during night and be with you as early as possible to-morrow."

The second, addressed to Edwards, Post-Office, Canterbury, was as follows:

"Meet me about four-thirty to five, Star Hotel."

He hesitated over the wording of the last message, as if wishing to add some further words; then remembering that Penrose was unknown in Canterbury, and that there was small risk of his detection there, he handed the forms and the fee over and drove off again, this time straight ahead for the old city. But coming to its outskirts, his cunning and foresight asserted themselves. He left the car at a roadside inn, and choosing some devious and little-frequented bypaths and alleys, came to the hotel by a back entrance, and was safely bestowed in a private sitting-room before anyone but the landlord, who knew him well, was aware that he was in the house.

Yet it was by the merest chance that he and Miss Delomosne did not meet; for she was in the stable-yard as he passed through the garden, and she saw him, though he did not see her, and she took her measures accordingly.

First she had her motor-car safely locked up in a vacant coach-house, and put the key in her pocket; then she sent her chauffeur off to another hotel, with strict injunctions to remain there until she fetched him; then she dodged into the hotel by way of the kitchens, and, after a word to a much-interested waiter, was as quickly hidden in a private room as Sir John was. Both delivered similar strict injunctions to this same waiter—viz., that they were not to be disturbed; that, in one case, a gentleman was expected; in the other, a lady; that, in both, the callers were to be immediately conducted to the private rooms. The waiter wondered what game of hide-and-seek this was, or if it were mere coincidence.

The room in which Miss Delomosne found herself looked out on the street, and she quickly arranged the curtains of the windows so that she could keep an eye on the people who came to the hotel by the principal entrance. She had not been watching long before she saw Penrose emerge from a side street and cross over in the direction of the hotel. She knew him at once, though she had not set eyes on him for years, and she was surprised to see how smartly attired he was, how jauntily he carried himself, how

carelessly he glanced about him as he trod the street with a firm step. Could it be possible that this was the man who was a fugitive from justice, and who was even then plotting with another—more villainous even than himself—to commit some crime, at the nature of which she could only guess? He looked like a man of culture and leisure, idly strolling at his will about the streets of the old city.

“But I suppose that’s all part of the game!” she said, bitterly. “I wonder what it is that they are concocting?”

If she could by any chance have been present in a room a few doors away in which Sir John and Penrose were then closeted in privacy, and could have heard the conversation which they carried on in undertones, Miss Delomosne would have been speedily enlightened as to the fact that the particular concoction brewing was of some particularly deadly nature, though she would not have grasped all its detailed wickedness.

“Well?” said Sir John, when the door was closed.

Penrose drew off his gloves with great deliberation, sat down, and drew his chair nearer to Sir John’s. “I don’t see how it’s going to be

done," he said. "I've looked carefully round, and to me it seems impossible."

Sir John's straight, thin lips sneered. "Impossible is a word I don't know much of, Mr. Edwards," he said. "Make yourself clearer."

Penrose went to a writing-table, and, picking up pen, ink, and paper, returned to the table at which Sir John sat, and began to sketch out a rough diagram. "Perhaps this will make things clear," he said, "and perhaps you'll be able to tell me, after seeing it, how the thing's to be done. Now, here's the Three Travellers—an old building stretching round three sides of a quadrangle. This is a paddock, which faces the open side of the quadrangle. In the paddock stands the barn in which they're at work."

"Well, it looks easy enough to get at," said Sir John, inspecting the diagram.

"Easy enough," said Penrose, "if it were not for the fact that it is being patrolled day and night by police."

"Police! A thorough patrol?"

"Thorough."

Sir John knitted his brows and fingered his chin. "Look here," he said, after a pause; "what's the size of this paddock?"

"About sixty yards by forty."



"And the size of the base?"

"Forty yards by thirty."

"That means that the hedges, or railings—which are they?—are at all points within ten yards of the walls of the barn?"

"Yes, and they're hedgerows. Hawthorn—fairly thick," answered Penrose.

"Then we've got 'em," said Sir John triumphantly. "Is there any cover, wood, coppice, thicket, about from which you could steal out when it's dark and get down behind one of the hedgerows so that you could lay the steel globe in the hedgerow bottom after timing it?"

"There's a coppice at that corner," answered Penrose, indicating a certain point. "And it can be reached from a lane which passes here."

"Then that's all right," said Sir John. "You, with your knowledge of taking cover, can easily get into that coppice after dark to-night and work your way down to within ten yards of the barn. I told you I didn't believe in impossibilities."

"You didn't tell me the thing would be effective at ten yards' distance," said Penrose.

"It would be sufficiently effective at twenty yards' distance," answered Sir John, drily. "By-the-by, where is the thing?"

"In the bag, at the station."

"Don't fetch it until twilight," said Sir John. "There, that's all. Sit down—I'm going to order some tea. You must stay here. Ring the bell."

Penrose hesitated. Half-way to the bell he suddenly turned round. "Look here," he said, "I thought there wasn't going to be any loss of life?"

Sir John surveyed him with calm contempt. "Who says there will be?" he asked.

"I do. They're constantly at work in that barn," said Penrose. "And there's the policemen."

Sir John put his hands in his pockets and whistled. "Do you want to go back to Dartmoor or do you want liberty and South America?" he asked. "Ah! I thought so—your silence is very eloquent. Ring the bell."

And Penrose rang it, and sat down again, hating his taskmaster more than ever.

It was while these two were together that Charity visited Miss Delomosne, delivered her message, and was hurried away again. When she had gone Miss Delomosne once more began to puzzle her brains as to what she could do to avert the catastrophe which she instinctively

felt was coming. After some thought she rang the bell, and writing out a telegram asked the waiter to send it to the post-office by a trustworthy messenger.

This telegram was addressed to Miss Delomosne's own solicitor in London—a man whom she could trust to follow her instructions quickly and implicitly. What she said to him would have aroused some perturbation in the minds of the two men in the adjacent room.

“Please go immediately to New Scotland Yard and ask them to send experienced and skilful detective to meet me here at once on most urgent business.

“LILIAN DELOMOSNE.

“Star Hotel, Canterbury.”

She realised when that was done that there was now nothing for it but to await the further development of whatever it was that was going on. She stayed there alone, keeping strict watch from the window upon the street beneath, anxious to know if either Penrose or Sir John Bedford left the hotel; but at the end of an hour she had seen nothing of either of them. As the afternoon drew to a close she rang the bell and ordered tea; when it came she drank

it standing at the window. The twilight came on; then the dusk after it; so far nothing had happened. A thought occurred to her; she gently opened her door and after listening a while stole along the dimly-lighted corridor, listening at each door as she passed it. At the fourth she heard voices; listening more intently, she recognised them as those of the two men as to whose movements she was so anxiously curious. From a certain jingle of plate and glass she judged that they were dining, and, fearful lest the waiter should suddenly emerge and find her there, she went back to her own room. But now that she had ascertained their whereabouts she knew that she could keep their door under observation by leaving her own slightly opened, and she took up her post there and watched steadily.

It was almost dark when the door of that other room opened and Penrose emerged, closed it behind him, and went away in the direction of the stairs. She hurried to the window to see if she could see anything of him; the lamps had just been lit in the street below, and she fancied she saw him, a tall figure striding away to the opposite side. And again there was nothing to do but wait.

It was with a sense of great relief that at last she heard heavy footsteps in the corridor, and then the old waiter's voice bidding somebody to come that way. She hurriedly turned up the light, which she had purposely kept down; another moment and a tall, keen-eyed, hard-featured man, who might have been a professional cricketer or a gymnastic tutor in mufti, was bowing before her and inspecting her with curiosity.

"Inspector Skarratt, from New Scotland Yard, madam," he said. "I came by the first express I could get after Mr. Dawson called on us."

"I am much obliged to you," said Miss Delomosne. "Please sit down. I am in great perplexity, Inspector Skarratt. Perhaps I had better tell you everything as clearly as I can. If I do not make myself clear, stop me and question me."

Inspector Skarratt was noted as a first-rate listener. He sat watching Miss Delomosne intently, and it was only once or twice that he interrupted her to put a short, pointed question.

Miss Delomosne told him all she knew, and if Sir John Bedford had only overheard her he would have left the hotel and gone for his car with as little delay as possible.

But Sir John, all alone now that Penrose had departed on his nefarious mission, was smoking a cigar and awaiting the expected telegram from Sabatier. He was beginning to grow impatient about it, when the waiter appeared with the familiar buff envelope.

"Bring some whisky and soda up here, will you?" said Sir John, as he took the telegram. He sat down and opened it in his usual leisurely way when the man had gone out of the room, and his eyes glanced its first words over half carelessly. Then he sprang to his feet with an oath, and holding the message to the light read it through :

"Regret report terrible accident. Charge of engine immediately succeeded by terrific explosion, probably by mistake in mixing chemicals. Sabatier killed on spot ; Bremond fatally injured, but still alive ; laboratory blown to pieces. Will wire later or early to-morrow.

"LEPEL, Secretary."

Sir John folded the telegram up, placed it in his pocket-book, and sitting down again, stared hard at the fire. Whether he heard him or not he took no notice of the waiter when he came in

with the whisky and the syphon of soda, nor did he help himself to a drink when the waiter had departed. He sat there, chewing an unlighted cigar, and still staring at the flames, for a long time—so long that the hands of the clock had marked an hour and a half's advance since Penrose left the room. He was so motionless that he might have been dead or asleep, but for the light in his eyes. And he neither moved nor spoke when a light tap came at the door, which presently opened gently and was as gently closed again.

"Good evening, Sir John!"

Sir John looked up and round—slowly. For all his seeming inattention to the things of the moment he had heard that tap at the door. He expected to see Penrose; instead he found himself looking at Inspector Skarratt. He looked—and said nothing.

"You'll excuse my unceremonious entrance, Sir John," said the inspector. "I just want a few words with you."

"Well, say them," said Sir John.

"You came to our place lately with reference to the escape of Edward Penrose, Sir John?"

"Well, what then?"

"I've reason to believe that you have some



knowledge of his present whereabouts," continued Inspector Skarratt. "In fact, I know that he has been in your company in this hotel and in this very room this evening."

Sir John turned to the table and poured out a glass of whisky. He helped himself to soda, and drank before he replied. "You seem to know a deuce of a lot, Skarratt," he said.

Inspector Skarratt made no immediate answer. He allowed a moment to elapse, then he said, quietly: "You're making a great mistake, Sir John. From what I can learn—and see—you're helping Penrose to escape. You know——"

"I know that you red-tape fellows imagine a good deal," exclaimed Sir John. "If you want Penrose, find him for yourselves—take him for yourselves—and be hanged to him and you!"

A quick, hurried step in the corridor outside, nearer—still nearer. Inspector Skarratt heard and leaped backward beyond the further side of the door. Another instant and Penrose was in the room, facing Sir John. His face was very pale, and he panted for breath as if he had been running.

"It's done!" he said. "I managed it——"

He saw Sir John's eyes looking over his shoulder, and he slewed round like a streak

of lightning and saw Inspector Skarratt; and as he saw him he uttered one sharp exclamation—half scream, half yell—"Trapped!" His hand went round to his hip and the revolver was out. In that brief second he had but one thought—one hunted-animal-like intuition—that he was betrayed, and he spun round again and fired twice at the man whom he believed to have betrayed him.

Sir John threw up a hand and then fell heavily across the hearthrug.

"Put that revolver down!" said Inspector Skarratt.

But Penrose was backing towards the window, covering the detective with his revolver. Suddenly he uttered a curious sound—half laughter—and before Inspector Skarratt could realise what he was about to do he turned the revolver upon himself, and a second later fell across a sofa which stood behind him.

And then came hurrying feet, and the sound of many voices in fear and astonishment; the room filled with people, and foremost amongst them was Miss Delomosne.

## CHAPTER XXIX

Inspector Skarratt had been present at too many tragedies and catastrophies in his time to lose his head, and his strong will and vigorous personality asserted themselves at once.

"Out of the room, everyone!" he commanded, at the same time motioning to the landlord and Miss Delomosne to stay. "You, waiter, downstairs quick—send for doctors and the nearest police—quick, now, outside!" He hustled servants, guests, and waiters before him like a flock of sheep, and turned the key on them. "He's quite dead," he went on, indicating Sir John Bedford's body with a nod of his head as he turned to the landlord and Miss Delomosne, "but the other man isn't. Here, help me to lift him on to the sofa, landlord—Miss Delomosne, give me a spoonful of that spirit."

Penrose was breathing heavily; under the inspector's ministrations he revived, and presently his eyes opened.

"He'll not be long," murmured Skarratt, as he saw the glaze in them. "A few minutes more."

The dying man moaned and turned his head—his eyes twisted round to the light and fell on the faces bending over him. They glanced, with returning intelligence, from the landlord to Skarratt, from Skarratt to Miss Delomosne. And at sight of her a strange expression came over them and the whitening face in which they were set. He made an effort to rise—to speak.

"Lilian!" he whispered. "Lilian!"

Inspector Skarratt was too well trained to betray surprise. He drew the landlord aside, and motioned Miss Delomosne to bend closer to the pallid face. She dropped on her knees at the side of the couch and laid her hands on Penrose's arms. His eyes thanked her.

"Lilian—listen!" he panted out in whispers. "Dying now—forgive—but listen. Lilian—run, run Three Travellers—listen, Lilian—explosive—steel globe—in hedge bottom—right-hand side of barn—twenty yards from road—will go off in twenty minutes—less—run—save their lives—no more sin on my soul—run, run, Lilian—find—throw it away in field—ah!"

"He's gone!" said Inspector Skarratt, striding forward. "What's that he was saying, Miss Delomosne?"

But Miss Delomosne made no answer. She was in a dream, a frenzy. She made one leap at the door, sought, found the key—and was rushing down the stairs and across the hall like a mad thing that must fly and fly. . . . She was out of the house, across the lighted street, at a street corner, staring around her before she realised anything. She seized upon the nearest passer-by with a grip that made him wince.

"The Three Travellers—the way—quick—quick!" she hissed in his ear.

The man pointed along the street, edging away from her the while. "Straight down—straight down—right at the end!" he said, and stood staring at her as she darted away from him. "Mad as a hatter!" he said. "Well, of all the——" And he moved off, rubbing his arm.

But she ran on, her heart beating to suffocation, the blood throbbing in her temples, her whole being surging and pulsating in agonised fear. Their lives—*his* life—Laurence's life! O Heaven—for more time—more time!

It was dark now, and the lights grew less in number, and the road less smooth to her feet, and overhead the trees assumed threatening and awful shapes against the scarcely seen sky. Supposing this was not the right way? Twenty minutes, he said, twenty minutes! Oh—for more time!

Suddenly, at a turn in the road, the quaintly-shaped, dimly-lighted windows of the old inn gleamed before her. And there, at her left hand, was the barn, and there, at the open paddock gate, stood a policeman who had just lighted a lantern. Through the crevices of the barn walls came shafts and flecks of light; within the barn a hammer was ringing on metal.

She was on the policeman, had torn the lantern out of his hand and had dashed into the paddock before the astonished man could realise what had happened. She was yards away up the hedgerow side, searching, searching, ere he had sufficiently recovered his presence of mind to follow her.

“Come back there!” he shouted, starting in pursuit. “Come back!”

But she had found the steel globe, and snatched it out of the weeds and grass in the

ditch. She threw the lantern aside and, clasping the deadly thing to her bosom, ran towards the further darkness. The policeman on guard at the end of the barn, startled by the shouts of his fellow-officer, flashed his light on her, made for her; she doubled round him like a hare, and ran on. Her breath was coming in short, sharp sobs, her heart seemed to be held in a vice she was quivering, shaking from head to foot. She ran on—staggering, but running.

Something black, huge, shapeless, rose up against the dim sky and its tiny sprinkling of stars. A wood! She paused in her headlong flight, summoned all her remaining strength, and dashed the steel globe as far as she could against the black mass in front. Then she turned, tried to run back, tottered a few yards, and fell headlong as the second policeman flashed his lamp upon her.

A blinding flash of light—a sickening, thunderous roar—a tearing and rending of timber—a lifting of the ground—and all was swept away as she went down into a seething maelstrom of black waters.

They were all round her now—so many people—so much light—so much hurried talking. She opened her eyes, and found herself in



Laurence's arms, his face, anxious and drawn, close to hers. And instinctively she put out a hand and laid it on his.

"You are safe?" she whispered.

She felt his arm tighten round her, and as her eyes closed again she felt that, in the presence of all those wondering folk, he bent closer and pressed his lips to hers in a kiss that spoke to both of them.

Two yards away Charity saw that kiss, and caught crippled Dickie up in her arms. "Oh, Dickie," she said, "if I'd lost you—if I'd lost you! Thank Heaven, I've got you yet!"

And then everybody was full of excitement, all wanting to know what it was that had really happened. Passers-by came crowding in from the roadside, and Mr. Waple, and such customers as had been in the Three Travellers at the time of the explosion, hurried across, full of fear for the airship; and the constables suddenly remembered that when Laurence and Dickie Wraye had rushed out of the barn the doors had been left open, and reminded him of it. But Laurence, who had contrived to get a few words of explanation from Lilian Delomosne, turned a calm face on them and the excited crowd which made a ring around him and her.

"There is no danger now, my friends," he said. "Thanks to this lady, who has literally saved our lives and my invention, the latter is safe. You will all see in the newspapers what a dastardly conspiracy there has been against me. Let me tell you that one man is dead in Canterbury to-night, and that two others were killed in France this afternoon—killed, I am assured in my own mind, because they fancied they had discovered the new motive power which I have discovered, and had not. A few days more, and you and the world shall see my machine—and see and hear of wonders such as you have never known. And now let me take this brave lady where she can recover from this trying experience."

Therewith he led her across the road to Mr. Waple's hospitable doors and into the private parlour, and what he said to her there may be gathered from the fact that the day which witnessed the triumph of the aeroplane also chronicled the news of the engagement of its inventor to Sir Herbert Armadale's ward.

For the airship, which Laurence got his prospective bride to christen, and to which she gave the name of the Golden Venture, achieved, as everyone now knows, an astounding success,

making its first voyage from Canterbury to London and thence to Edinburgh, in the fastest time on record, and without a stop. How it was purchased by the government, how others of its type were ordered, what effect its appearance has had on European questions, is equally well known. Laurence Workman is already a rich man. He and his wife are figures in society, and they have already forgotten and forgiven the enemies who might have ruined him. But they have not forgotten old friends, and Charity Wraye is head of the clerical department of Workman's Limited, and Dickie is Laurence's right-hand man.

THE END



